

THE LOVE THAT LEAPS ALL BARRIERS.

BY

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"Poor child!—She was painting imaginary pictures of her fair-haired lover, and the happy life that they should lead together."—see page 7.



THE LOVE THAT LEAPS ALL BARRIERS.

CHAPTER I.

Linger awhile, love, linger awhile !
The star-light enshrouds us, the night is fair—
You have slain me, love, with a single smile,
You have caught me, love, in your dark eyes' snare,
And tangled my heart in the waves of your hair—
Oh maiden, dowered with a beauty rare,
Linger awhile, love, linger awhile !

A BRILLIANT moonlit evening. Silver-tipped arrows of light are quivering 'mong the fleecy cloudlets overhead, and darting down into the wide expanse of ocean lying tranquilly beneath, where whole quiver-fulls of Dian's choicest favourites are shattered and scattered until they form one broad stream of soft seductive light, in which the laughing ripples chase one another shoreward like merry healthful children brimming over with fun and freedom.

Lazily rocking to and fro among the shadows is a tiny rowing boat, small, and unpretentious, yet strongly built and sturdy, it rises and falls with the heaving of ocean's bosom ; for its solitary occupant has laid aside his oars that he may lean back listlessly among the crimson cushions and dream his dazzling day-dreams

undisturbed. Thus he lies, with his head resting upon his arms, and his eyes wandering absently over the fairy scene, while the little boat drifts on and on, out of the shadows into the moonlight, and still further into the shadows again—emblem of the young throbbing life with which it is freighted !

Launcelot Devigne is a dreamer. Not that his days have been spent, or are likely to be spent wholly and solely in dreaming—not that his lusty limbs and brain are useless encumbrances for which he finds no scope, no functions—but that his soul is filled with strange fancies and strong ambition, and burns and thrills with the passion-fire which leaps from heart to brain and throbs and quivers in every pulse of the poet-dreamer's being.

And Love ?—has that soft influence as yet no place in the heart and desires of our hero ? Is he striving now to re-weave, and inter-weave with realities of the Present, the loosened threads of the Past ? Is he gathering up and unravelling the tangled threads of the Future ?—Or is his imagination haunted by, and surrendered to, some fair face and a maiden's soft ensnaring, an innocent woman's devotion, or the allurements of a pretty coquette ? Aye, love has but lately dawned in its fullness for Launcelot Devigne, only a few days since he gave himself up heart and soul to the fair being who shall be his Fate ; for, although he has bowed beneath many shrines, and sighed under the influence of many boyish fancies and more matured fascinations, the passionate love which is felt but once in a life-time has but now pierced and slain him, the beautiful ideal of the dreamer's fond imagination has but lately been found and claimed.

Tall and broadly-built, with the manly strength and vigour of an Achilles, and the finely chiselled features of an Adonis—fair-haired and soft-complexioned, with the deep blue eyes which are a woman's wonder, and the broad white forehead which accompanies power of thought and noble deeds, our hero appears capable of moving a multitude, or of being the idol and the destruction of womanhood : and many are the mouths which already speak his name with reverence, and many, alas ! the hearts which are bleeding and breaking for his sake, hearts which have surrendered to his thrilling glance, and soft, entrancing whisper.

Ah, handsome Launcelot, beware!—You have played heedlessly although not wantonly with the affections of others; but *your* turn has come at last, and *your* heart will bend like a bruised reed beneath the purging tempest of pure love!

A raging thirst for fame is at present the ruling passion of the dreamer's life—an uncontrollable ambition to be great, how or where he cares not—but his eyes flash and his lips are set tightly with a firm and invincible resolution as he thinks of the laurels that have yet to be won, and ponders on the surest and swiftest method for their winning.

Thus the young man dreams on, heedless of the flight of time, until the Queen of Night has reached her highest point in heaven, until the breezes' breath which wantons with his tangled curls chills with the approaching dawning; and he wakes with a start to find that the little boat has drifted far from the village on the outskirts of which stands his father's noble mansion. Once more taking up the oars Launcelot Devigne turns the boat's head homeward, and propelled by vigorous strength of early manhood he speedily reaches the bay from whence many hours since he set out, and, springing on shore, drags his skiff up the beach out of the grasp of the clamorous surge. Then he hastens up the steep cliff-path, his mind filled with unformed fancies, and his heart throbbing with vague desires.

On the summit of the cliff, the young dreamer pauses—and then apparently allured by the glimmer of a light in one of the casements of an ivy-grown cottage, situated in the opposite direction to the mansion which he boasts as home, and whose turrets and towers loom darkly in the distance, he leaves the beaten path, and, climbing a fence, runs lightly across the intervening meadows until he stands panting and eager beneath the lighted window, and looking up, speaks a dear name softly.

“Gwyn!”—Noiselessly the casement is flung back, and a small shapely head framed in a mass of dark brown hair is thrust forth, the olive-tinted skin, small finely moulded features, large wistful dark eyes, and tiny pouting red lips, all plainly visible, lit up by the soft moonlight, to the lover as he stands hidden in the shadows below.

“Gwyn, what are you doing at so late, or rather at so early an

hour?—for it is nearly morning.”

“And what are you doing here, Mr. Devigne?”

“Mr. Devigne!” he echoes mockingly—“Oh Gwyn, I have been on the river, and it was delicious—I wish you had been there.”

“Why?”

“How can *you* ask *me* why Gwyn?”—returns the other reproachfully—“you whom I love”—

But the girl interrupts his confession with a light laugh, accompanied by a sudden intimation that she must close the window.

“I shall see you on the shore to-morrow darling?”

“Yes—I suppose so—if your sister is not with you.”

“Confound my sister!” exclaims the young lover impatiently—“I will take care that she is not with me, Gwyn, or else I shall have you gravely turning away your pretty head again with that unconscious innocent expression of face which you wore last time when I would have claimed acquaintance with you in the presence of my sister.”

“Miss Devigne could hardly condescend to speak to me.” The words are modest and humble, but the red lips from which they fall are curled with a proud scorn which her companion does not fail to notice.

“Gwyn, you are proud—more proud of your humble station than my sister of her exalted one.”

“A poor girl’s pride is her safeguard,” answered the soft voice laconically—“Good-night, Mr. Devigne.”

“Good-morning, Gwyn.”

Staying at his post of observation until the window is again closed and the white draperies closely drawn, Launcelot turns away and once more bends his steps homeward, his thoughts busy now with the remembrance of the pretty face he has been gazing at, and the fearless light in the eyes which had looked innocently down into his.

“I wish she was not a fisherman’s daughter,” sighed the young man as an hour later he lay down to rest in his luxurious chamber—“yet with all her outward professions of humility she is as proud as a queen at heart, and as pure.”

Launcelot Devigne had still to learn that "love will leap all barriers," knowing no distinction of position, or of place—and yet he would have scorned the idea of ever proving false of heart, or tongue, or life to the brown-haired child whose wonderful picturesque bewildering beauty of form and feature and colouring had won his fancy and his admiration.

And little Gwyn?—What were her thoughts that night as her head nestled cosily among the white pillows, and her tired eyes closed in sleep?—Poor child! she was painting imaginary pictures of her fair-haired lover and the happy life which they should lead together; until with the soothing murmur of his tender tones in her ears, and the soft utterance of the dear name upon her lips, she fell asleep as innocent and trustful as a little child.

CHAPTER II.

Ah! I remember when first I found
The boy-god's shaft in my bleeding breast.

DORA Devigne, Launcelot's only and petted sister, is leaning back listlessly on a luxurious couch which stands, and has ever stood since Dora can remember, in the wide old-fashioned window of the library at Lynne Court.

The queenly, well-developed, somewhat voluptuous form of the young girl is shown to full advantage by the negligent grace of her attitude, and the severely simple style of her richly embroidered robe, the colours of which (pale green and gold) are wonderfully becoming to the blonde beauty; while the handsome face almost perfect in feature and colouring, with its classically arranged frame of fair tresses, has a background of antique amber curtains and cushions which give an air of royal magnificence to the girl, making it not difficult to believe that her ancestors ranked among the first of the nobility, and that the Devignes even now can boast royal blood in their veins. Strangely alike in feature are the brother and sister; and yet

the likeness would not be apparent at first sight, since the habitual expression of each face is so strikingly dissimilar that a stranger could scarcely suppose them to have one thought or purpose in common.

Dora is no dreamer like her brother—Launcelot can never descend to scheme and intrigue, and to waste life in voluptuous ease and selfish pleasure like his sister. The sole aim in life, the great heart-desire of the one is to revel in yet grander magnificence and luxury than is to be found at Lynne Court, as the wife of an English nobleman or of a foreign prince—the aim and yearning of the other is the vague unapproachable aim and yearning of a poet, the unrealistic yet infinitely grand and stainless on-looking of a refined and noble soul. Dora, with woman's vanity, boasts of her aims and attainment—but Launcelot has hardly yet dared to utter even to himself the burning hopes and dreams which he cherishes. Aye—though born of the same mother, and bred under the same roof, the brother and sister are indeed dissimilar, are indeed twain.

“Dora ! ”

“Well, Lance ? ”

The young girl's tone is peevish and indifferent, neither are the words peculiarly gracious—but then Miss Devigne treasures her soft tones and words for use when visitors are present, besides the brother is too proud and fond of the spoilt beauty to take offence.

“Dora, have you determined to marry Grove Lacey ? ”

A low musical peal of laughter rings through the room in answer to this question, and the light in Dora's eyes flashes and ripples with amusement as she looks up at the young man's grave face and meets his searching glance.

“Marry Grove Lacey ! Oh Lance dear, how absurd.”

“It is not absurd for him, Dora,” returns her brother gravely.

But an impatient shrug of the shoulders and the pouting of red lips is his only answer.

“Do you know that he loves you, Dora ? ”

“*Peut-être*,” laughs the young girl again indifferently.

“It is too bad, little sister, a great deal too bad to treat the poor fellow so—you have encouraged him to flutter about you

like a moth around a candle, and now that he has singed his wings you mock at him and scorn him."

"Has he singed his wings, poor fellow?" says Miss Devigne, elevating her eyebrows enquiringly.

"You know that he loves you, Dora."

"He has not told me so."

"But you could see to what these frequent visits and his evident infatuation have been tending."

"Surely Grove Lacey has not been making a confidant of you Lance?" she enquires again, with a little impatient stamp of the tiny velvet-clad foot.

The young man does not answer immediately; but presently, the question being repeated in a tone which shows the lady is resolved to obtain a reply, he says evasively—"Lacey is a good fellow, Dora, and when we were at school together he always appealed to me to help him out of his scrapes."

"And the latest scrape into which he has fallen, and in which he has appealed to Launcelot Devigne's superior judgment for extrication, is falling in love—well, I am sorry for his bad taste in the choice of the object, eh Lance?"

"If I did not know you better," returns her brother severely, "I should certainly from your words suppose you to be unworthy of any honest man's love."

"Thank you."

"Come, come Dora! you and I have never quarrelled yet, and we must not let anyone come between us now. I am sorry for Lacey; but no doubt he will bear the disappointment like a man. Perhaps, after all, he has been too hasty in forming conclusions, though I must say I thought myself that you liked him."

"So I do like him, Lance—but not like *that*."

"Well, it can't be helped now I suppose," says the young man, turning with a sigh from the window where he has been standing watching absently the distant crested waves leap on the shrinking shore—"so we will say no more upon the unpleasant subject. I am going out now Dora—you expect visitors I believe?"

"Yes, I think it is likely—But I will come with you if you like, Lance" she adds, suddenly remembering the stormy interview which she will probably be compelled to undergo with her

impassioned lover if she remains at home—"Can you wait?"

"I would rather you did not come this morning dear—and indeed, Dora, you had better see Grove should he call, and end his suspense—*Au revoir* until luncheon, when I will not fail to put in an appearance to help you entertain the company should any remain"—and with a bright smile the young man opens the library door, and a few minutes later his sister sees him walking hurriedly down the road in the direction of the sea.

It is a bright sunny morning, and a fresh breeze blowing in from the ocean seems to herald new life and hope to our hero as he hastens along the sands, looking anxiously around for the tiny figure of the fisherman's daughter which he knows so well. Presently, turning a promontory of cliff, he catches a glimpse of her standing upon a ledge of rock, shading her eyes with her hand and gazing wistfully and expectantly out to sea; and so absorbed is she in her occupation that it is not until the young man is almost close to her that she becomes aware of his presence.

"Gwyn, what are you watching so anxiously?—Do you expect to see a mermaid among the surges combing her dazzling tresses?"

Demurely stepping down from her post of observation the young girl stands on the sands beside him before making reply.

"Father has been out all the night fishing, and I was waiting for his return, Mr. Devigne."

"But he is often absent for several days, is he not?"

"Yes, but mother expects him back this morning, and so I came out to watch."

"Gwyn, why do you call me Mr. Devigne now?" enquires the young lover abruptly—"It was Launcelot, you know, the last time that we met here—Have you forgotten that meeting in the moonlight, and all that I told you then?"

Locking her small hands nervously together, and shrinking from the caress with which Lance would have enforced his plea, the fisherman's daughter replies softly that she has not forgotten.

"Well then Gwyn what is it?—Darling"—he continues eagerly and passionately, as a half-repressed sob bursts from the poor child's quivering lips—"I would give all I have to serve you if you

are in trouble—I—”

But flinging off the hand which he has laid gently upon her shoulder as he speaks the young girl turns indignantly upon him, her eyes flashing and her breast heaving with suppressed emotion.

“How dare you treat me so, Mr. Devigne? How dare you, because I am poor and unprotected, speak to me as though—as though”—

“As though what Gwyn?” interrupts the young man quietly.

But hot tears have gathered in Gwyn Lisle’s eyes, and ashamed of her weakness and of the passionate words which she has been betrayed into uttering, the girl breaks suddenly away and runs lightly across the sands towards her home.

“Gwyn! Gwyn!” Launcelot cries beseechingly, but the echo of the beloved name among the topmost peaks of cliff is his only reply, and, too generous to pursue her further, he turns sadly away as the little figure disappears up the steep pathway leading to the heights.

Meanwhile eager-hearted impulsive Grove Lacey has pleaded his suit in vain with Dora Devigne—pleaded eloquently and patiently as only one whose heart is in his words can plead, and been refused.

There is nothing peculiarly attractive about Grove, unless it be his easy good-nature and the careless *sang froid* with which he has hitherto taken the kicks and rebuffs which he has received through life. In appearance he is tall and manly, and although he can scarcely be called handsome even by the most enthusiastic of his friends, there is a certain charm about the frank eyes which look into yours, and the full lips round which a smile is so often lurking—No; Grove Lacey is not a man to be noticed and remembered, and yet somehow he is often selected for notice and remembrance, though where the spell lies it were difficult to determine.

“And this is your final answer Dora?—You will not let me hope that at some future time I may be successful where now I have failed?”

“I can never love you, Mr. Lacey, except as a brother—Indeed I have always regarded you in that light, knowing what firm

friends you and Launcelot are. If I had dreamt of the possibility of your caring for me I should have treated you with more formality, but of course I had no suspicion of such a calamity."

It was a cruel speech, and the young man winced beneath his disappointment. She regarded him as a brother merely, what hope then could there be of his ever holding a nearer and dearer place in her heart? Thinking thus the wealth of love which he had lavished upon this woman rose up like a lost spirit before him, and he exclaimed bitterly "*care* for you Dora! you did not think of the possibility of my *caring* for you, wise woman of the world as you are; why, my whole life and hope is wrapped up and woven with yours inextricably, so that were we never to meet again I should still be as much yours in the separation as I could have been in a happier fate. You must have seen, Dora, you must have known how anxious I have been to please you, and it was the refinement of cruelty for you to allow me to woo if you had resolved that I should never win!"

Ah! Grove Lacey had yet to learn that Miss Devigne was willing enough at all times and under all circumstances to be wooed, but that to be won was another matter to her, and a separate consideration which would require mature thought and calculation. It was pleasant enough perhaps to be wooed by this titleless young man with his paltry income of five hundred a-year ("Barely sufficient to pay my milliner's bill," thought the young girl contemptuously), but only gold and title, only lands and luxury could induce her to surrender her maidenly freedom.

"Is it necessary, Mr. Lacey, for me to repeat that I neither thought of the wooing nor the winning?"

"Then heaven forgive you Dora! for your thoughtlessness has been the means of dealing me a terrible blow," returned the young man as he rose to take his leave; and then, with a few words of formal farewell, he hastened from the room and from the house.

Half-an-hour later Launcelot Devigne returning from his interview with the young fisher girl met Grove Lacey listlessly pacing the shore and musing upon the disappointment which he had suffered. There was no need for question and reply between these two, for Grove's face told its own tale and Lance was ever

a ready sympathiser in his friend's distress.

"Cheer up, Lacey ! you will get over it in due course, you know—Time heals all wounds no matter how deeply they have probed into our hearts."

"Time must certainly be a mighty healer if he has balm in his keeping that will bring me happiness without your sister," returned the other doubtfully.

"Nevertheless, although now you are naturally inclined to be sceptical, you will find the truth of the old adage in the long run."

"Are you quite sure, Devigne, that Dora has not given her love elsewhere ?—that I have no rival ?"

"Of course you have rivals, my dear fellow" said his friend seriously—"For you must not forget that my sister is a beauty, and that she must necessarily have suitors and claimants for her hand in the society in which she mixes : but I still adhere to my belief that she is heart free."

"Then I shall hope eventually for a different decision from her lips—You will do your best for me Lance ?"

"I have already promised you that—Indeed one of the dearest desires of my heart is to see Dora safely under your guardianship."

After this the conversation turned upon Launcelot's dreams for his own future, specially in regard to the book upon which he had long been engaged, and which was now near its completion

"It will be a grand hit no doubt" said Grove proudly—"You will make a great name by that drama Devigne."

The young poet's eyes flashed with the strange fire that was so incomprehensible to his practical friend, and he looked away to sea as though, like little Gwyn, expectant of the approach of some vessel not yet in sight—only Launcelot's ship was not of earth's creation, but the vague glorious exultant hope of a future never to be realised.

"I am not so sanguine of its success as I once was," he said presently, breaking the silence which had fallen between them—"When I was in town this season, Lacey, I met a young author whose genius had served him more faithfully than mine. He

had sung many strangely beautiful songs; but the world had refused to listen."

"Because he had the demon of poverty to grapple with I suppose?" enquired the other absently, his thoughts still busy with the recollection of Dora's dismissal.

"Yes, he was poor, very poor, I believe."

"And no doubt out of the generosity in your heart you helped him in his difficulty," said Grove smiling—"No, you need not trouble to deny it Lance—I know."

"Well, I did help him a trifle; but he was proud as well as poor and it was difficult to make him see that my help was not a favour conferred but taken—However, it was of no use; and his fate has disheartened me with my work."

"Has the star already fallen from the firmament then?"

"He found the world too hard for him, and so he left it—I have a letter from him, penned on the fatal night. It is full of noble thought and language and pathos, but it is also filled with the unsatisfied longing of a wearied soul and with a great despair."

"The world is hard for all of us, Devigne—and just now I feel as though I could almost abandon her myself," rejoined his friend prosaically, as they paused before the entrance to Lynne Court, and his eyes eagerly sought the windows in search of its young mistress.

"You won't come in, Lacey?"

"No, thanks—I am too cowardly to face my trouble yet—besides you will be deep in your work before many minutes if I leave you in peace—Good-bye Devigne—Use all your influence in my favour!"—And with a hearty grasp of hands the two men parted.



CHAPTER III.

Forgive you !—Ah there was no need
 To ask me that—for love must live
 When once a hand hath sown the seed—
 And though the heart may pant and bleed
 Strong love will force it to forgive.

LIFE and Love !—What unsolved problems they are, what mysteries profound and unfathomable: what mighty masters of humanity, and yet what shadowy indefinable Presences !—Dwelling ever around us and within us, yet eluding the grasp of our finite comprehension, the eager yearning enquiries of our wonder-filled intellect: mocking at the so-called “march of mind” for which the age is famous, shrinking into shadow when the light of reason and research is turned full upon them, yet breathing in every breath we draw, throbbing in every pulsation of our being.

Life and Love !—The first comes to us unsought, to possess the other in its full meridian splendour is the desire of every heart, and, consciously or unconsciously, the aim of our existence. How persistently the subtle Life lurks in every movement of our limbs—in the impatient gesture, the sudden pressure of the hands to the too quickly throbbing heart, or their weary lifting to burning temples ; in the toiling of the feet over stony pathways, or the light step which carries us through ways more pleasant ! How wonderfully life reveals itself in the turn of the head, the swift glance from the eye, the words which fall from our lips, in the activity of mind which finds fittest expression in an author’s labour, in the bounding exuberance of youthful spirit and ambition !—and how equally delicate and subtle is the revealing of Love in the timid glance or the passionate long-gazing, in the warm pressure of hands as two hearts throb together, in the heaving of a woman’s breast, and in the yearning sighs of manhood—in the thousand trifles which are trifles only to beholders but are all the world to the actors in the life-drama which is being played out largely by their means !

Gwyn Lisle was the only child of honest-hearted fisher folk. Poor and proud, with that pride of purity and fair-dealing which belongs peculiarly to the toilers in the lower ranks of life, she had lived her seventeen years in the tiny village where she had been born, and had grown up in all the simplicity and innocence of a village maiden, yet with a mind far above the ordinary petty trifles of her lot. The little hands, small and shapely as any lady's, had been used to bearing many heavy burdens and to performing many harsh duties ; the little feet had often wearied with wandering and with toiling, but the heart which beat beneath the coarse yet picturesque brown bodice was brave and true, and the large wondering eyes were never dimmed with tears on account of the lot which God had given her, although at times there was a wistful yearning in their depths which spoke of hope for a happier future.

In the springtide of the preceding year one of the most important events in Gwyn's monotonous existence had occurred—the loss of a large vessel in the bay, and the rescue by her father of a golden-haired blue-eyed beauty from the grasp of the greed-maddened insatiable surges. For several months the lady thus saved had lived with the Lisles in their ivy-mantled cottage, renewing the strength and health which had been sadly impaired by the shock which she had sustained in the sudden loss of her nearest relatives and by her long immersion : and the period of Cressida Heath's sojourn had been to little Gwyn a time of wonder and of intense enjoyment ; for the visitor was an accomplished woman of the world, and pitying the ignorance of her host's pretty daughter she had taught her many things which seemed marvels to the simple-minded parents, but to Gwyn were the revealing of new paths of light, the food for the craving of a high spirit and a mind capable of keen comprehension and more than ordinary cultivation.

But above all, Miss Heath had developed in the young fisher girl the great gift which she herself possessed—the thrilling gift of song. Hour after hour the two girls would lie together upon the moonlit sands, or wander aimlessly through the sunny meadowlands and woodlands, while Cressida taught the words and melodies of songs which she had learnt in her fashionable

London home, and in the far countries to which a fond and wealthy father had carried her, thus instilling into the mind and heart of little awe-filled Gwyn that passionate love for melody which few possess, but which many, for the sake of conventionality and custom, affect.

To the London beauty life in the fisherman's cottage, and companionship with the village-bred fisher girl had been novelties charming for the time on account of the position which she held as an unrivalled beauty, and a being from a superior sphere—the sphere of fashion and of pleasure. It was a life so far removed from that which she had always led that for a time Cressida sunned herself in the triumph which her loveliness and romance had earned her; while little Gwyn looked up to her with such evident child-worship and admiration that the girl-vanity was flattered, and she stayed on day after day, loath to leave yet ever resolving to be gone—only tearing herself away at last on hearing from her lawyers of the urgent necessity for her presence in town.

Spring has bloomed into Summer, Summer has mellowed into Autumn, and Winter with his snow-crown and icy-sceptre is asserting loudly his right to the supremacy of Nature before Miss Heath condescends to send tidings of her welfare to the village homestead, in the shape of a delicately penned and perfumed note addressed to Gwyn Lisle.

"Well, little one, what is it?" enquires the rough fisherman one evening as, on his return from a day's toil, he finds his daughter awaiting him at the gate, her face radiant with the good news she has to tell.

"I have a letter from Miss Heath, father—she is coming to the village again in a few days, and wishes to stay with us."

"I'm sure we shall be right glad to welcome her," returns the old man heartily as he enters the humble dwelling—"have you written to tell her so, Gwyn?"

"No father—but I will."

"Aye, do lassie—the sight of her bonnie face will cheer up the old home, and besides you will be glad of your lady companion again."

And thus it came to pass that the unsuspecting girl wrote a

cordial invitation to the fashionable belle ; not dreaming, being herself a woman, that womanhood could fall so low as to betray friendship and use for dishonourable ends an honest hospitality.

* * * * *

A few days later Gwyn Lisle sat in the cottage porch busily engaged in mending one of her father's much worn nets, while Cressida Heath, attired in a faultless Parisian costume stood close by absently watching the little fingers darting in and out of the complicated network, and considering the best means for introducing a subject which had been occupying her mind since her arrival.

"That is a large mansion just outside the village, Gwyn, is it not ?" she ventured presently—"do you know the name of its owner ?"

"Yes,—Mr. Devigne—he is our squire," returned her companion—a soft blush rising to the delicate cheeks as she pronounced the name of her lover.

"Devigne !—Not Launcelot Devigne surely ?"

"The son's name is Launcelot, I believe," said Gwyn quietly.

"How very extraordinary !" exclaimed Miss Heath with well-assumed surprise—"Mr. Devigne and I were great friends two years ago in Italy. The family did not live in that great mansion when I was here before Gwyn, or we should have met ?"

"They were in London I think—You were great friends with Mr. Devigne, you said, Miss Heath ?"

"Oh, yes !—But that was two years ago ; and he may have forgotten me now."

The sound of approaching footsteps prevented the young girl replying, for a strange step in the desolate roadway where the cottage was situated was an unusual event, and both girls looked up with expectant eagerness. Nearer and nearer came the footfall, until the sound died away as the pedestrian stopped at Mr. Lisle's gate, and Launcelot Devigne's cheery voice rang out in a merry greeting to the fisherman's daughter. Then, perceiving the lady visitor leaning languidly against the open doorway, the young man would have passed on, had not Cressida, seizing the welcome opportunity, uttered a little cry of surprise and swept down the pathway towards him.

"Mr. Devigne!—I thought I could not be mistaken in that voice—Have you quite forgotten sunny Italy, with its gay carnival—and have your after acquaintances entirely banished from your mind the remembrance of poor Cressida Heath?"

"Cressida!—Miss Heath!—you *here*!"

"Yes—you did not know that I could claim acquaintance with your pretty *paysanne*?—Gwyn," she added merrily, turning to the girl who still sat silently in the porch busied with her humble occupation—"Gwyn, Mr. Devigne has quite forgotten me as I told you."

"That work is too hard for you, Miss Lisle," said Launcelot, as he came slowly up the pathway, Miss Heath by his side, and standing opposite little Gwyn looked down on her gravely as she worked.

"I am used to it, Mr. Devigne"—The girl's voice was very low and calm, but the little hands shook nervously, and the heart which had throbbed so eagerly at the sound of her handsome lover's footfall seemed almost to cease its pulsation as the words with which he addressed her fell on her ear—"Miss Lisle"—It was the first time he had called her that, and oh! what could it mean?

A few commonplace questions and replies, an ordinary interchange of courtesies passed between the young lovers, and then Cressida enquired for Miss Devigne.

"My sister is quite well—and will be glad to renew her acquaintance with Miss Heath, I have no doubt," rejoined Launcelot looking up at the fair questioner, and critically contrasting the appearance of the two girls—an examination which resulted in the awarding of the laurel of superiority to bewitching self-possessed Cressida, to the discomfiture of the pretty agitated fisher girl.

"By the way my sister gives a dinner party to-night" remarked the young man presently—"If you are not too tired with your journey Miss Heath she would be proud for you to join us; and I should be equally flattered to be your escort."

"Was Cressida Heath ever too tired for pleasure?" enquired the soft syren voice mockingly—"I shall be delighted to accept your kind invitation, Mr. Devigne."

"Then I will supply your enviable place by Miss Lisle's side while you are adjusting your attire," rejoined Launcelot laughing — "Remember the proverb about painting the lily, Miss Heath, and do not keep Dora too long in ignorance of her good-fortune."

Then as Cressida flitted away to don her most becoming evening costume, the young man bent over Gwyn enquiring in the soft pleading tones she had learnt to know so well why she was so silent; and, meeting with no response, began a recital of the circumstances which led to his acquaintance with her visitor during his sojourn in Italy. But the young girl, proudly refusing to listen to his explanation, rose from the low seat beneath the porch and politely invited him to wait for Miss Heath in the little parlour.

"I would rather wait here, Gwyn, and talk to you."

"But I am going in now, Mr. Devigne—Mother is indoors and she would be pleased to talk with—

"Conf— I beg your pardon—You know Gwyn that it is *you* I want to talk to."

"I am sorry that I must leave you then, Mr. Devigne, if you will not come in" rejoined the young girl quietly—and, pretending not to hear his pleading voice although each word cut to her heart, she passed swiftly through the open doorway and ran up to her own little chamber in the roof; where, flinging herself upon the bed in an agony of grief and injured pride, she sobbed forth the greatest sorrow which had entered her young heart to an ever sympathising Creator.

Half-an-hour later Cressida Heath and Launcelot Devigne left the cottage together, and little Gwyn, watching them wistfully from the tiny white-draped window noted the merry triumph in her rival's voice, and saw the admiration in her young lover's eyes as he looked proudly down on her.



CHAPTER IV.

Work of poet's weaving,
 Long and late achieving,
 Fallen prone before my face—a fevered dream of youth.

GROVE Lacey's prophecy regarding the success to be achieved by Launcelot Devigne's drama proved fallible. A few able critics lauded the work in private, a few (*very few*) reviewers wished the youthful author good speed on his literary career through the medium of the press. Those, indeed, who took the trouble to *read* the drama, and were capable of comprehending the deep truths with which the language was impregnated spoke great things of the new aspirant for the poet's laurels, of the fresh star that had arisen in the firmament of fame.—But readers were few, and competent critics were fewer; while the energetic publisher placed the volumes upon his topmost shelf with the worldly-wise words, “All my publications are likely to be asked for before this volume of verse, and it is useless to try to force upon the public works for which they have no taste.”

So the young dreamer bore in silence the vanishing of his first fair dream of fame; while Grove Lacey fumed and fretted almost as much over the non-appreciation of his friend's drama as over the failure of his own suit for the hand and heart of the beautiful Dora.

“If I were in your place, Devigne, I should go to London and look after my laurels,” said Grove one evening, as the two young men sat smoking and chatting in Launcelot's study.—“I believe the poem is simply dying for want of a vigorous voice to push it.”

“Very likely.—It is not of much consequence, Lacey.”

“Not of much consequence!” echoed the other, impatiently.—“Why man, the book is filled with noble thought and purpose that should benefit the world, and make you a name for all future time.—What has come over you, Devigne, that you can calmly contemplate the blind world shrugging its shoulders at your claims, when for years you have been all eagerness and enthusiasm

about the venture ? I shall think seriously of giving credence to the rumours which I have heard in the village."

"Man gathers wisdom with the years," answered Launcelot, evasively.—"What rumour have you heard that can affect me, Lacey ?"

"That you are madly in love with charming Miss Heath—It is the talk of the village."

"Then the gossips speak falsely," returned his friend angrily, as rising he threw away his cigar, and walking to the window drew back the curtains and looked out upon the night—while Grove Lacey, after a few moments of silence, having consulted his watch and found that it was near midnight, announced his intention of taking his departure.

"It's a terrible night, Lacey," said his companion, turning at his words and crossing the room again towards the bright fire close to which Grove was comfortably ensconced—"Do you hear how the wind is moaning and howling, and the maddened sea dashing wildly on the shore ?—A sea like that always reminds me of hell-bound beings gnashing their teeth in torment."

"I shall go down to the beach before I turn in to-night," rejoined Grove quietly.

"In that case I will accompany you—let us start at once then Lacey—who knows but some poor creatures may be out yonder crying for help."

"Help could not reach them if they were," affirmed the other gravely as he followed his friend into the hall.

A few minutes later the two young men were hastening down the cliff pathway which led to the beach—the wind whistling and howling around them as though eager to deprive them of breath. Once or twice, indeed, Lacey, whose strength was not equal to that of his more strongly built companion, was compelled to pause in the descent, and to lean against the rugged boundary of cliff gasping and bewildered.

"Depend upon it, Devigne, there *is* some ship in distress close by," he said as, emerging at last upon the shore, they noticed a group of fishermen gathered together in the gloom, their faces turned sea-ward ; while, at the same moment, a rocket shot into the air revealing the position of the ill-fated barque, and showing

how small and frail she was—how totally incapable of long contending with such a sea as was heaving and seething around her.

“Is she one of our own vessels ?” enquired Grove Lacey eagerly, as the two men joined the group who were hopelessly and helplessly awaiting the final catastrophe.

“Aye, sir—Lisle and his daughter are abroad, and one or two more of our comrades.”

A low cry burst involuntarily from Launcelot’s lips at the tidings, and he grasped his friend’s arm for support.

“Lacey, we must save them !”

“Impossible,” replied the other decisively—“as the men say, there is nothing to be done—God help them !”

“But something *must* be done,” exclaimed the young lover authoritatively—“A hundred pounds to anyone of you who will accompany me to the rescue !”

It was a large bribe for the hard-working villagers ; but, looking out to sea, the certainty of a terrible death seemed to take away all temptation to earn it, and no answering voice was heard.

“Then I will go alone to save her,” said the young hero turning resolutely away to seek his own small boat which lay higher up the beach—“Will any of you lend a helping hand to launch me on the perilous voyage ?”

“Devigne, you are sacrificing yourself for love of little Gwyn Lisle ?” said Grove enquiringly, the light suddenly dawning upon him.

“Yes—I love her.”

“Then I will go with you ; and, by God’s help, we will pull through yon roaring waters and bring home your bride.”

“But you have home-ties to consider, Lacey,” began his companion hesitatingly, “while I should have nothing to live for if she were dead.”

“I have not much to keep me” sighed Grove, as they ran the boat along the sands down to the water’s edge—“Life is of but little value, and if you were lost, Devigne, I should indeed be wearied of it.”

Seeing that the young men were determined to make the

attempt, the rough fishermen gathered round, eager to push the little boat safely over the first roaring breakers into deeper and less perilous water.

The first start was a failure; for an immense billow surging shoreward took in its strong arms the frail structure and flung it again upon the beach—The second attempt, however, proved more successful; and Launcelot, seizing the oars, struck out vigorously for the dark object reeling to and fro but a short distance from home and haven; Grove following his friend's example more slowly, since his strength was already failing him.

Ten minutes of horrible suspense—of struggling madly with grim Death for the mastery—and then the young men ran their boat as closely as was practicable alongside the fast sinking vessel; the hearty voice of old Lisle, clear and unfaltering above the storm, cheering them on, while the sight of a little figure lashed to one of the bulwarks nerved the lover's arms to greater exertion.

“How many on board?”

“Three.”

“Your daughter first, Lisle,” shouted Launcelot—“Then you and your man follow—But quick, for she is sinking!”

Then, steadying the boat as well as he could, the young lover stretched out his arms to receive the light burden; and the father and his comrade following, they pushed off for the return journey, Launcelot supporting the trembling fisher-girl, and whispering to her during brief lulls in the tempest words of hope and comfort.

“Whom the gods love die young”—We have so often heard the saying quoted that many of us have unreasoningly placed the seal of our faith to it as a proverb infallible, as a truism indisputable: nevertheless life is oftentimes so dear to a youthful heart, especially when it has but lately become lit up and impregnated with the presence of a first love, that doubt will arise in the minds both of the receiver of the deadly dart and of the bereaved whether the gods are not after all more cruel in the dispensing of their so-called favour than in its withholding. There is something truly pathetic, something which appeals straight to the heart, in the unselfish yearning cry of one in the budding season

of life who pleads to be exempted yet a little while from the "common lot" for the sake of one intensely dear, for the sake of some sorrowing wife, or husband, or lover, some little clinging wailing child, some aged parent, or even a friend whose friendship has been life itself, and from whom separation cannot be regarded but as a bitterness and solitude, a punishment and pain.

Launcelot Devigne was not afraid of death—He had a hero's heart and hardihood, and this dismissal of subjective fear to man's tyrant, this refusal to bend the neck beneath the yoke of him to whom lesser souls aye bow, is the first evidence of an heroic nature, is the severing of the first link which binds a soul to earth—And yet, as the young lover looked from the eyes of her who was his all to the raging waters which surrounded them, he felt a strong unconquerable yearning for life that he might still hold her in his arms protected from all ill. Gwyn Lisle was, indeed, in those minutes of supreme danger, more dear to the man who had risked his life to save her than heroism or stoicism could ever make a painless death, or than natural desire could make a perfect paradisal life.

"If we can but pull through yon breakers we are safe" hissed the old sailor between his clenched teeth, as he piloted the boat with skilful well-used hands toward the shore—yet even as he spoke the sea seemed to rise to a towering height in their wake, and a huge billow dashed itself revengefully upon the speaker and his hearers.

But Launcelot Devigne, tightening his clasp of the frail form beside him, resolved that come what might at least she should not perish alone; and thus as the greedy waters took him into their close and cruel embrace, and his head sank beneath them, the instinct of self-preservation was subservient to that of love, while the young life with which he was burdened endued him with the strength of a giant as he rose once more to the surface, and battled with the billows which strove to impede his progress.

Yet, after all, how vain is the vanity of human strength, since for each of us there is a time when failure is inevitable, and the slave which has served us so long and faithfully deserts us in our greatest need.

It seemed hard to our struggling hero that he should perish so near to shore, it seemed terribly hard that after having endured so much he should feel the numbness of despair stealing over him and know that grim Death was smiling triumphantly upon his prey.—Yet a few moments and all must be over—and Gwyn and he would be—

But a shout from the shore broke in upon his dim dreamful reverie, and, with a forlorn hope, he strove to penetrate the gloom.

“A rope! A rope!”—Stretching out one hand mechanically, Launcelot Devigne grasped the rope which had been flung him, just as strength and consciousness abandoned him to the mercy of the maddened mocking waters.

CHAPTER V.

She was mine own before you came,
 She was mine all, my very life—
 She would have stooped to bear my name,
 And I been proud to call her wife.

“ AM in no mood for appearing at your ball, Dora; and I wonder at your bad taste in persisting in such gaiety so soon after my friend’s death.”

Three weeks had passed since Launcelot Devigne had rescued ship-wrecked Gwyn Lisle, and Grove Lacey had sacrificed himself for the sake of a noble-hearted friendship such as is but rarely met with in this world of lonely lives and unsympathetic sorrows. Grove had been the sole prey that death had succeeded in grasping from among the occupants of Launcelot’s little boat on that terrible night, for the hardy old sailors had swam to land in safety, and Launcelot, still closely clasping the motionless form of the girl he loved, had been drawn to shore by eager hands and speedily restored to consciousness by tender and skilful ministrations.

Gwyn herself, however, had borne the shock of the immersion less successfully, and for several days the watchers around her couch had despaired of the fluttering life ; but new strength had at last been infused into the weakened frame, and though the young lover had not yet been enabled to see and converse with the woman whose danger had taught him to read his own heart, he had received satisfactory tidings of her convalescence, and had no fear of her being ultimately restored to perfect health.

“I am sorry Grove is dead,” said Dora Devigne petulantly, in answer to her brother’s reproachful words—“But you know Launcelot that if I were to make a martyr of myself and abstain from this gaiety, as you call it, the poor fellow could not be brought back to life : besides what use is there in giving way to melancholy when the means of forgetfulness are in our hands ?”

“Well Dora, you must do as you will—but do not count upon my help.”

“Now Lance that is unkind—of course I shall count upon you. Why, what would people say if you absented yourself from the ball-room, and what excuse could I make to the inquisitive who would be sure to besiege me with enquiries the whole evening ? You forget too that this ball is given in honour of Cressida Heath ; and that as I have accepted her invitation to spend several months at her town mansion, the least return I can make is to show her this slight civility before our departure.”

“Is Miss Heath anxious for the ball, knowing of the late bereavement in our neighbourhood ?”

“Of course she is, Lance—and it is cruel and unmanly of you to keep reminding us of that terrible night when we nearly lost you, and of death, and bereavement, and other horrors the mention of which you know make me so nervous that—that”—But Dora being at a loss for words took refuge in woman’s last resource—a flood of tears.

“You will have to face death some day Dora whether you are willing or no,” said her brother scornfully, as, too sick at heart to argue longer with the frivolous wayward girl, he flung away the book he had been engrossed in perusing before his sister’s entrance, and strode from the room ; shutting the door violently behind him, and muttering angrily of the folly and hard-hearted-

ness of woman.

* * * * *

The night of the long anticipated ball.

Brilliant floods and rippling streams of light and melody pour through the windows and open doors of the mansion where Dora Devigne reigns haughty hostess and queen, and wander like lost spirits into the darkness of night without ; illumining in part the desolate lawn and winter-dismantled flower-beds, the frost-bitten fountains, and the hardened gravel walks ; lighting up with weird fantastic mockery of radiance, and surrounding with scornful mirth of sound, many statuesque carven beauties whose stony eyes stare strangely from nooks and bowers in the grounds, and throwing into deeper desolation of shadow and silence the background of wooded land beyond.

One vagrant ray of light, however, from the great hall where the ball is at its height, has found a more congenial temporary resting-place—the face of a man in the hey-day of youth and strength who stands at the foot of the broad flight of steps leading to the terrace upon which the windows of the ball-room open, watching (himself unseen) the gay scene within, the cynical smile upon his lips showing that he has no desire to enter and make one of the merry throng, yet the wistful yearning in his eyes when one of the fair revellers comes in sight, betokening that his heart is not wholly in his own keeping, and that his presence there to-night is neither purposeless nor vain.

Presently a glass door at the further end of the terrace is flung noiselessly back, and a young man stepping cautiously out, hastens past the lighted windows and descends the steps close by the eager watcher, who shrinks back into the shadow at his approach and lets him pass ; smiling again sarcastically as he thinks that in all probability this man is bound for some secret tryst or intrigue, and that if they end as *his* trysts and intrigues have ended—

But hush !—Another step is hurrying along the terrace, a light gliding footfall that from its softness and its lightness must be that of a woman ; while the shrinking listener evidently recognises the step, for his face is ashen white, and he holds his breath as a slight richly-robed figure comes in sight, and a girl

brushes so closely past him that he fancies he feels the perfume of her breath upon his cheek.

“I thought so.—It is Cressida herself—and following that man,” he mutters fiercely, when she is out of hearing; and taking from his breast some weapon which had lain concealed, he starts in pursuit.

Meanwhile Launcelot Devigne (for he it was who, overcome by memories of his lost friend, had stealthily left the ball-room to wander alone in the grounds) has crossed the lawn and entered a shrubbery, where, thinking that no inquisitive eyes can follow him, he is pacing up and down, communing with himself and recalling past scenes and recollections.

“Mr. Devigne—Launcelot !”

Startled by the unexpected sound of a woman’s voice in so lonely a spot and at such an hour, the young man turns hastily, and utters an exclamation of annoyance and surprise as he recognises his late partner, Cressida Heath.

“Miss Heath!—Pray let me see you safely back to the house at once.—That cloak is but scant protection over your light dress on such a bitter night. Many deaths have been owing to less causes, and my sister would be indeed vexed if—”

But impatiently interrupting his words of solicitation, the young girl lays one hand upon his arm, and replies brokenly that she had seen him pass the windows and had felt constrained to follow him at any risk.

At a loss to understand the signification of such strange and unprovoked solicitude for his welfare, Launcelot renewes his entreaties for the fair guest’s return to the ball-room—but Cressida is not thus easily to be deprived of the opportunity she has long sought, nor has she that innate sense of womanly dignity that should have deterred her from stooping to speak of a fascination which has long since perished and been forgotten.

“Lance”—she begins softly, pleadingly—“You were not like this in Italy.—You would not have spoken so to me in the sunny land where we first met, and where you told me I was the first woman you had ever loved.”

“Not *loved*, Miss Heath.—Whatever folly I may have been tempted by your beauty and the witchery of our surroundings to

whisper into your ears, I never used that sacred word in connection with your name.—That I admired you and was fascinated with you is true, that I followed your steps from town to town and sought your society eagerly and even intrusively I am willing to admit, but that *love* was ever theme between us, I as solemnly deny; nor could it have been so since the subtle passion was then unknown to me.”

“Then?” she repeats eagerly, hope still struggling in her heart—“*Then, but not now?*”

“No—I have lately learnt the lesson which comes to all once in a lifetime,” answers the young man earnestly, his eyes aglow with love as he thinks of little Gwyn.—“Did you come to congratulate me, Miss Heath?”

Dimly divining that this man whose love she craves speaks of a rival, that the heart she has counted upon easily winning for herself, has been given to another, Cressida hesitates before making further admissions which may compromise herself, before again stooping to plead for a love which it seems stern Fate has not destined shall be hers; but the heart of the gay coquette has been surrendered, as wholly and irrevocably as such weak natures are capable of self-surrendering, to the handsome scornful man before her, and she determines to make yet one other attempt to enchain him by the magic of her beauty and her passion.

“I am going away to-morrow, Mr. Devigne—we may not meet again for years,” she begins, clasping two small white hands upon his arm and looking wistfully up at the stern face—“And oh Lance, Lance! I cannot go without telling you—I love you!”

The words are wailed forth as the cry of one forsaken and despairing, and a light breeze catching them upon its outspread pinions wafts them to the ears of a man crouched low among the surrounding bushes, where, like poisoned arrows, they stab him to the heart, and kindle in his distempered brain the ever growing fire of vengeance, the gnawing cankered yearning to take the life-joy from a rival; and yet a sense of honour and of fair play restrains the fingers which have mechanically sought the trigger of the pistol which he grasps, and he feels that he would prefer to grapple face to face and hand to hand with the man

who has snatched from him the coveted jewel he has long worn and boasted of, rather than slay him in cold blood, letting his life ebb out perchance before he is made conscious of his offence.

There is silence for a few moments after Cressida's confession ; silence which is only disturbed by the quick breathing of the agitated girl and the loud throbbing of her heart.—Then Launcelot replies in the same low tone in which he has spoken hitherto (and which has prevented the secreted watcher from understanding that the companion of his betrothed spurns the love upon which he sets such value) that his heart is indeed given into another's keeping irrevocably.—“The beautiful Miss Heath,” he adds soothingly, “has no lack of suitors and surely will not miss one so humble from her train.”

“ You do not believe that I love you—You think that because I am courted and flattered, because I am called a fortune-hunter and a coquette that I have no heart, no capability of feeling your scorn ! ”

“ Pardon me, Miss Heath, I do not scorn but pity you—To-morrow you leave Lynne Court, and I need not say that you may rely upon me strictly to keep your confidence in this matter.

“ And I have loved you so long ! ” she cries, clinging to him still when he would turn away, anxious to end the painful interview—“ I have loved you since the first night we met—Oh Launcelot ! have pity on me, and before I go say that you forgive me, and—and kiss me just once—just this once—for I shall never look upon your face again ! ”

“ There is nothing to forgive, Cressida,” says the young man more gently as he remembers how he should feel if his love for Gwyn had met with no return—“ And if you really wish it, and are going away for ever ”—

He has placed one arm around her and is bending to give the farewell for which she has pleaded eloquently with eyes and lips, when, maddened by the sight of the supposed bliss of a rival, the witness to this strange interview starts from his concealment and, striking him a blow upon the face, advises that Miss Heath be set free and that he should look to his own life.

Having no doubt that some error is the cause of so sudden and

unprovoked an attack, Launcelot Devigne would have questioned the intruder had he given time and opportunity, but so swiftly are blows and taunts rained upon him that, thinking at last he has a madman to deal with, the young man closes with his adversary and wrestles with him ; while Cressida, pale and trembling, stands by to see the end.

Presently, however, a low cry of warning and of horror breaks from the girl's lips, and, regardless of the consequences, she flings herself between the foes—for the stranger, finding that strength is failing him, has snatched the pistol from his pocket, preferring to be branded with the crime of murder rather than the dishonour of defeat.

It is the work of a few seconds—The band in the brilliant ball-room has not yet struck the concluding chords of the gay valse, the tones of which had fallen strangely upon Launcelot Devigne's ears as they mingled with the pleading passionate prayer of his young companion, before Cressida Heath, shot to the heart, stricken down in the full flower of her woman's beauty, and in the zenith of her pride and power, lies motionless, pulseless, soulless upon the earth at the feet of the lover and the loved.



CHAPTER VI.

So darling, we who were wrapt in night,
Are henceforth bound in a pure love's might,
And life shall be but a long delight.

“I WILL not betray you—You had intended to take my life, not hers—There is yet time to fly !”

So spoke Launcelot Devigne to the young man who was kneeling beside the prostrate form of Cressida Heath, his hand pressed upon her heart in the vain hope of detecting some fluttering, lingering life-motion.

But for answer the awe-stricken lover only lifted his head and repeated hoarsely, his eyes filled with a yearning pain and horror—“She is dead—quite dead—and I loved her.”

“Are you mad !” exclaimed the other impatiently, pity for the man stricken by such sorrow overcoming all fear for his own personal safety—“They will miss her from the house in a few minutes, and then you will be lost !”

“You say you were no rival ?”

“I have told you that I had no thought of making Miss Heath my wife—But for love of Heaven rouse yourself man !—Do you not see that there are figures upon the terrace with torches and lanterns, and that they are coming to search the grounds ?”

Turning his head slowly at his companion's words, the youth looked toward the mansion, and for a moment hesitated as though doubtful whether to flee or stay—then, stooping suddenly, he picked up the pistol which had fallen from his nerveless grasp, and, concealing it in the bosom of his coat, bent once more over the lovely face up-raised to heaven and kissed reverently the dumb lips.

Shaking him roughly by the shoulder, Launcelot made one last effort to arouse him to a full consciousness of impending danger; but in vain.—Nearer and nearer came the voices of the searchers, until the lights which they carried flashed a ruddy glare

down the shrubbery pathway, and lit up with strange, weird radiance the loveliness of the woman who lay slain. Then, as the excited group approached and gathered with loud exclamations and lamentations around the body, the murderer arose and waved them off, no sign of fear in his unflinching face, no trembling of the hand which drew forth the fatal pistol and warned them to stand back.

For a brief space there was a hush in the tumult of voices, none daring to be the first to disobey the desperate wretch who threatened them—and those few moments were sufficient for the completion of the terrible tragedy.

“ You see this woman ? ” said the stranger firmly and distinctly—“ She was my betrothed, and, believing her to be unfaithful, I have killed her—He ”—(pointing to Launcelot who still stood silently by)—“ had no part in the deed—So now, fair Cressida, you have suffered for your folly and shall be avenged ! ” he added, with one last glance at the ghastly face of the beautiful coquette—and then, before the boldest of the group who had stepped forward to secure him had time to warn his fellows, the young lover turned the pistol against himself, fired, and fell without a cry or moan, to the earth.

* * * * *

“ Little Gwyn, I have come to claim the fulfilment of your promise.”

“ What promise, Mr. Devigne ? ” enquires the young girl, blushing consciously as she rises from her low seat by the fire on her lover’s entrance.

Closing the door of the little parlour carefully behind him, Launcelot Devigne comes forward, and taking both her hands in his, looks down earnestly at the pretty face as he replies reproachfully “ you said you loved me once, Gwyn, and that you would be my wife.”

“ But that was so long ago,” she falters, struggling to withdraw the little hands from their imprisonment—then, finding that he is determined not to let her go without an answer, she finally gives way, hiding her shy eyes and modest blushes against her lover’s shoulder.

“ You are not jealous now Gwyn ? ”

"I am too happy" she says softly—"But, oh Lance, how terrible it was for Cressida Heath to be murdered so strangely! Father was at the inquest yesterday, and he told us all about it."

"What is that about father?" broke in the rough voice of the old fisherman from the doorway.

"Only that his little daughter wants to know how soon he can spare her from the home-nest," rejoins Launcelot, turning, with his great love reflected in his face, to the intruder.—"You see it is all right Mr. Lisle.—I told you that I would win my coy darling at last."

"Does father know then?" enquired the young girl, perplexedly.

"Of course father knows!" exclaims the old man heartily.—"Old birds have sharp eyes and look after their little fledgelings, you know Gwyn—And now I must go down to the shore to my work—My daughter will keep you company as long as you choose to remain Mr. Devigne"—And with a smile and a nod at the young lovers who still stood by the bright fire together, Mr. Lisle closed the door, and was gone.

There is no need to linger over the explanations and the joy which followed—the hopeful days of betrothal, and the happier days of marriage life which succeeded; when, sharing one another's sorrows and rejoicing in one another's joys, life was one long intense delight, one sunny rippling ocean, the shadows which fell across which being only those from passing clouds and powerless to stir the hidden depths which slept beneath.—For Love, after all, must be experienced not explained, and Content will not soothe with her soft whisperings an aching heart that has known no thrilling of a kindred heart against its own, no mingling of desires, no peace of resting in the knowledge of love which knows no faltering, of satiety and satisfaction that can never cloy.

Launcelot Devigne would not consent to wait many weeks for the perfecting of his bliss, for the marriage-rite which joined the hands of those whose hearts were already one—and thus, only two short months after her deliverance from a terrible death, little Gwyn took up her abode at Lynne Court, winning the hearts of all by her unaffected simple dignity, and delighting Launce-

lot's father by the devotion which she paid the son who had ever held first place in his heart since the death of his young wife during Dora's babyhood.

At first the instalment of the fisherman's daughter at the Court was a sore trial to Miss Devigne, but she consoled herself during her next season in town by accepting the offer of a wealthy nobleman for her hand: and though it was true that the intended husband's years counted nearly treble her own, and that he was already through extravagance and dissipation in his dotage, she was gratified by the anticipated indulgence of her luxurious tastes, and by the advanced position which she would attain in society.

And Launcelot himself?—O, mighty magician, Love! O, wonderful lamp of wifely ministration which led him forward on his career! For the drama which had been scorned and left to perish became beneath such influences a grand success; while year after year found the young husband still building up a great name, and achieving richer laurels as guerdons following every fresh venture.

For the barriers which obstructed the smooth course of love had been over-leaped, and with their fall had been ushered in a life of usefulness, of honour, and of unspeakable content.

T H E E N D.



I A N T H E.

A DRAMATIC POEM.



BY

 E O N A R D  L O Y D.



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БИТИЯ

Лицо с открытым ртом

Все сидят в земле

Сидят в земле



MANTHE

BY LEONARD LLOYD.

“ Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher,
Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.”

SCENE I.—*The Sea Shore.—Early morning.—CUTHBERT pacing the sands.*

“**V**ANITY of vanities,” was sung of old
By one inspired, “all things are vanity,
And there is nought to profit ‘neath the sun !”—
Methinks the world hath grown no wiser yet,
For man is just as wearied with his life
And pleasures pall as easily. Ah me !
Would lagging Death would come and lay his hand
Upon my burning brow, that I might rest
And maybe find oblivion ! For this life
Which boasts its kinghood in each painful pulse,
Each kindling thought, each word that leaves my lips

Though loath to utterance, every hope and sigh,
And slightest movement of these listless limbs,
 Is but a prolongation of my pain,
 Adding each day new sins and sufferings
 To millions mourned already ; till I fain
 Would bare my breast and with a lightened heart
 Bid the destroyer welcome !—What is here ?

(Stoops for a paper.)

Some poet wandering forth at eventide
 Hath loosed his throbbing thoughts it seems in song,
 Then tossed them to the winds.

(Reads.)

“ Give me a heart whose tendrils shall entwine
 Closely around mine own with love sincere !
 “ Give me a heart whose pulses beat with mine
 In passion’s purity, as year on year
 Outlives its youth, grows grey, and finds a bier
 Strewn with the sighs and sobs of those who pine
 For perished pleasures, and high hopes they see
 Scattered like blast-torn blooms which wither lingeringly !

“ Give me a heart that yearns toward the good !
 That flees from evil, panting for the pure
 And the eternal, sipping honeyed food
 From nature and from solitude, secure
 In simple faith, nor heeding sinful lure
 To win it from its melancholy mood
 To live on laughter, and to vaunt of vice
 As soothing human souls in pleasant paradise !

“ Give me a heart that, having known past pain,
 Shall greet me with sweet sympathy when sad !
 Yet when the light breaks, and I smile again
 To see the stony path with verdure clad,
 Shall change with mine own mood from grave to glad,
 And constant through all changes shall remain ;
 A heart that throbs with love for me alone,
 Whose melody shall intermingle with mine own ! ”

'Tis an old tale—a soul unsatisfied,
 That craves for human sympathy. Alas !
 Life is a dreary waste unless 'tis lit
 By the pure light of love ! We have a round
 Of daily duties, and we grope our way
 Amid the darkness, like lone ships at sea
 Breasting the laughing billows, till we stand
 Without the slightest warning face to face
 With the one being who must make or mar
 The music of our lives ; then God help those
 Where Death or falsehood comes between ! for earth
 Hath nothing worth the giving after that
 Except an early grave, where memory
 Of sin and sorrow and of all passed pain
 Perchance shall lie entombéd with the heart
 That broke beneath their burden.—Long ago,
 In the first springtide of my youth, when life
 Was full of laughter, I could jest at love
 In merry mocking tones, and heart-whole look
 Upon the beautiful ; but when *she* came,
 My little Mabel, with her artless wiles
 And innocence of early maidenhood,
 Love crept into my heart and nestled there
 Unbidden, yet unchecked. But she is dead !
 And lying in her grass-grown grave.—Oh God !
 Were there not angels in your heaven enough
 That you must snatch my darling from mine arms,
 Close those blue eyes and dainty laughing lips,
 Still the quick throbbing of a heart which beat
 In melody with mine, and claim the breath
 Of the one being in the whole wide world
 That yet was left to lavish love upon ? (A pause.)

How the sea moans

In musical monotony, and on its bed
 Tosseth like one bereft of his beloved
 Who cannot find forgetfulness.—Methinks
 The Sea is a sweet comforter ; for I have found
 More consolation in its murmurings

Than in the clamorous sympathy of men :
And often when the shadow of the night
Was cast upon the cities, and the heavens
Star-studded, I have told my tale of life,
And love, and losses to it as it lay
And listened at my feet, while with soft sighs,
And kisses, and low whisperings it hath soothed
Mine aching sense of pain—Oh mighty sea,
When death comes to me let me lay my head
Upon your lap and sleep !—

'Tis scarce three years
Since the earth sheltered Mabel.—By her grave
I stood as in a dream, nor sigh nor sob
Broke from my parchéd lips when she was hid
For ever from my sight. I cannot tell
If any wept for her or aught was said
Of sympathy and comfort, but it seems
When the last sod was laid upon my love
They led me unresisting as a child
To my lone home again.—Then, when night fell
And I was left alone, the light broke in
Upon my sleeping senses, and the truth
Like tongues of fire flamed fiercely to my heart
And burnt into my brain, until I rose,
Crept all unnoticed to my darling's grave
And laid me down and called her, while o'erhead
The willow shiv'ring in the wintry blast
Scattered its dead leaves round me, and the sobs
Of the fast falling rain mingled with those
Which broke from my torn heart and shook my frame
Convulsively.—

Yes, it is scarce three years;
And still the wound Death dealt me when he snatched
My Mabel from the strength of sheltering arms,
Which would have held her clasped in close caress
Defiantly, is only partly healed,
Nor ever will be wholly, yet I find
A new love springing up beside the old,

Like daisies on the grave of one long dead.
 And shall I bury memory to make
 Ianthe *my* Ianthe ? Shall these lips
 Linger on hers while in each other's arms
 We languish love-locked ? Will there never come
 The shadow of past bliss, and stealthily
 Stealing between us haunt my heart with thoughts
 Of olden loves and pleasures ? Shall I lie
 With mine arms round her sleeping while my eyes
 Are dreaming that they look upon the love
 I lost long years ago ?—Yet wherefore not ?
 Ianthe need not know, and she will make
 My lot less lonely ; when the sun hath set
 I'll seek and tell her so.

SCENE II.—*A garden of roses—Evening—IANTHE (alone).*

Roses red, and white, and yellow,
 Each one fairer than its fellow,
 Some half-blown and some more mellow—
 Budding beauties day by day,
 Which is fairest who can say ?
 Roses of all sorts and sizes
 This my garden ground comprises ;
 Rich in colours, fair in form,
 Suitor bees enamoured swarm.—
 Beauties ripening day by day,
 Which is sweetest who can say ?
 But a tiny tree is growing
 By the gate, on which is blowing
 One small rose with petals white,
 Which my love praised yesternight,
 And to me 'tis fairer far
 Than the other roses are.
 Little rose, you have no brother !—

Yesterday there was another,
 But my lover plucked and gave it—
 Here, against my heart, I save it ;
 Pledge of love that will not die
 Like the flowers which round me lie.
 Is he coming to this meeting ?
 How this foolish heart is beating !
 For a secret it encloses :
 A sweet secret, little roses.
 Listen ! I will whispering tell—
 I love Cuthbert wondrous well !

CUTHBERT. Ianthe ! are you there, my love, my life,
 Mine own, my sweet Ianthe ? Oh, how fair
 You are to-night, my darling ! what a light
 Shines in those soft blue eyes ! If I dare think
 That they are lit with love, and that for me,
 I should be happy as the blest in heaven ;
 For what is heaven but love ? and love makes heaven,
 Even on earth, for me. Come to me dear !
 I am consuming with my passion's fire !
 My heart but beats in unison with yours,
 And holds but one fair image, while my mind
 Has but one thought, and these my lips are loath
 To form a name, unless it be your own.
 I am impatient at another's touch,
 I cannot listen to another's voice,
 But when I hear your step or whispered words
 My heart beats wildly, like a fluttering bird
 Against its prison bars. Ianthe, speak !
 Tell me you love me darling ! let me feel
 You are entirely mine eternally.

IANTHE. I love you, Cuthbert.

CUTHBERT. My beautiful ! my queen !
 Say it again, 'I love you,' for 'tis sweet
 As water to the dying, or as death
 To deep despair. Ianthe ! mine, my own,

For ever mine ! Oh love ! if joy could kill
 Then should I fall now dying at your feet.
 But those sweet words, which hourly I have hoped
 And hungered for, were winged with subtle life,
 A nobler, fuller life than they can feel
 Who know not what it is to be beloved.
 Lay your head here, upon my breast again,
 And tell me that you love me just once more !

IANTHE. I love you, Cuthbert, dearly, more than life.

CUTHBERT. More than your life, Ianthe, more than life ?

You are *my* life, my darling ! and this heart,
 The moment that you died, would cease to beat :
 But we will live long years ! yes we will live
 And love ! Ah ! would that this were heaven,
 So cruel Death could never come, nor aught
 To separate an instant ! would that we
 Folded in one another's arms as now,
 Might live eternally.

IANTHE. How strange is life !

I do not think we really live until
 We learn to love some being better far
 Than we have loved ourselves ; it is not life,
 The selfish and unsatisfying round
 Of so called pleasures, that some seem to think
 The height of human happiness ; for this,
 This love which came unbidden to my breast,
 Has made me a new being, changed my thoughts,
 My words, my actions ; everything is changed ;
 Even the world seems fairer, and the sun
 Sheds a more radiant light ; yon surging sea,
 Which used to make me sad before you came,
 Sounds now like sweetest music in mine ears ;
 The birds have merry notes ; each tiny flower
 Seems smiling with a new-found joy ; the trees
 Laugh as I pass beneath them ; every breeze

Whispers your name ; and even when I sleep
 In dreams I see you still and hear you speak.
 But, Cuthbert, there is one thing I would know—
 Am I your first and only love ? has earth,
 Or even heaven another maid who claims
 To share with me your heart ?

CUTHBERT.

Ianthe, dear !

My love for you exceeds all other loves
 (As the great sun a tiny glow-worm's light)
 Making them seem as nothing. Can the bee
 Leave sipping honey from a fragrant rose
 To linger on the thistle ? can a saint
 Leave Paradise to pine upon the earth ?
 You are my rose, and you my Paradise !
 I have no love but you ; I never had,
 And never can have, since that I have known
 What 'tis to love the fairest and the best
 Of womankind. I am entirely yours !
 My heart and my whole being are your own ;
 In sorrow or in joy, in life or death,
 In earth or heaven yours only ; and no power
 Can make me love you less, or make me look
 With love upon another. 'Tis the fate
 Of every being born into this world,
 If that he live to manhood, thus to love
 With his soul's strength, to lavish all his wealth,
 The capability that each one hath
 Of loving, on another, it may be
 On one who will not, cannot make return ;
 Yet 'tis no matter, for the cold contempt,
 The scorn, the hatred of the one beloved,
 Will never make his heart the least disloyal.
 And though in future years he may bow down
 Before the shrines of others fairer far,
 And render them lip homage, still his thoughts
 Will linger round his life-love, for she seems
 To dwell within a splendid temple, reared

Amid the ruins of the shattered shrines
 Of other deities. When God first breathed
 The breath of life into the man He made
 Out of the dust, with that life-breath there rushed
 Into man's heart the river of pure love,
 And ever since it hath been springing up
 Unquenchably. It is in vain we try
 To check its onward course—you might as well
 Place barriers to prevent the Alpine snows
 From melting 'neath the sun, and pouring down
 In torrents to the valleys; or to stem
 The daily tides of ocean, as to say
 To any heart, although it be your own,—
 "Thou shalt not love poor heart!" for love and life
 (The never dying life of every soul)
 Are woven fast together; so it forms
 The great necessity of all God-made
 To live and love for ever.

IANTHE.

I have thought

Often, when you and I are happy thus,
 Happy in one another's love, that earth,
 And even heaven, were made for us alone;
 And yet there must be thousands gazing now
 Upon God's stars, and thinking as we think,
 Feeling as we now feel. Before you came
 I often used to wander here at eve
 And talk to the sweet flowers. I had a name
 For every tiny tree, and used to grieve
 Over each rose which faded; and I thought
 That with my flowers, and the still stars, and God,
 I was as blessed as I could be on earth:
 But now I know the purest, noblest joy
 Which God can give to man, I wonder oft
 That I could ever live without your love.
 And, Cuthbert, you have seen the busy world,
 And lived in the great cities,—have you known
 Any two beings blest as we are now,

With not a fear beyond ?

CUTHBERT.

I had a friend

Long years ago, who had a fair young love,
 Much like to you, Ianthe—azure eyes,
 Large dreamy eyes, a wealth of flaxen hair,
 A low sweet voice, a sunny smile, a heart
 Brimful of truth and tenderness—and he
 Was never tired of speaking of his love,
 Was never happy save when she was near,
 And then her presence made the earth a heaven,
 As yours does now for me.

IANTHE.

And have you seen

This beauty, Cuthbert ? or did he, your friend,
 Describe her charms to you ?

CUTHBERT.

Oh ! I have seen

The maiden many times ! but it is long,
 Yes, very long ago ; at least it seems
 A weary time to me, for since I lost
 That faithful friend, until I found you, dear,
 I have been very lonely.

IANTHE.

Did she die ?

Or was she false to him ? or are they still
 Happy together ?

CUTHBERT.

Yes, she died : and I

Stood by her couch after the spirit fled,
 And looked upon her face. She was so fair,
 With such a conscious smile upon her lips,
 So wonderfully beautiful, I said
 It was impossible she could be dead !
 That she would shortly wake and laugh at us
 For our false fears.

IANTHE.

And did your friend die too ?

For I have read that lovers often die
 Of broken hearts for those they lose, as I
 Should for your sake.

CUTHBERT.

Oh, no ! he did not die—

He could not, though he prayed with burning tears
 That God would send sweet death to him ! For days
 Kneeling beside her couch, he called on her
 And God, alternately ; he kissed her hands,
 Her brow, her lips, he stroked her long fair locks
 Caressingly, as he was wont to do,
 And would not leave her till they came by force
 To drag him thence : then he went mad awhile,
 And cursed the God to whom he prayed, and swore
 To sell himself body and soul for nought,
 To sell himself to hell ; but he was mad,
 And knew not what he said.

IANTHE.

And have you seen

Your poor friend lately ? Did he love again ?
 Surely he could not ? for such hearts as his
 Are ever constant.

CUTHBERT.

After Mabel died

I lost all comfort in his company,
 For he was always sad ; yet I have heard
 But lately he has found another maid
 Whom he has learnt to love, though, maybe, not
 With the same depth of passion. It is strange
 That he should love again : but there are hearts
 Which, while they beat, must love, and his is such.

IANTHE.

And are most hearts inconstant ? is it rare
 To meet with deathless loyalty ? I thought
 That true love was as pure as angels are,
 As perfect as their pleasant Paradise,

And as eternal as the throne of Him
 They worship constantly. Yet, now I think,
 I oft have heard my mother say, and sigh
 As she has said, that woman's heart beats true
 Till death, but that a man's will change
 With every fickle fancy ; like the sea,
 Which at the dawning, maddened by desire
 To clasp the maiden earth, and make its own
 That which has never known a wavelet's kiss,
 Panting with passion, springs toward its prey,
 Calling aloud on heaven ; and though 'tis foiled
 A thousand times, will only gnash its teeth,
 And, pausing for a moment as for breath,
 Dash wildly on again ;—yet, ere the sun
 Seeketh his western chamber, this same sea
 Will listless lie in sight of her he loves,
 And sing himself to sleep.

CUTHBERT.

Yet surely, dear,
 You think not thus of me ? 'Twere easier far
 To quench the sun, and put out all the light
 Of yonder stars, than to make this my love
 Languish an instant ! For the hand of Time,
 That cruel, crushing hand, which constantly
 Changes all earthly things—the faith of friends,
 The frown of foes, the hatred of hard hearts,
 The beauty of the beautiful, the youth
 And hope of early manhood, the despair
 Of the despised ; that turns our soaring songs
 To sadness, sadness back again to song,
 Makes mirth mere madness, bitter waters sweet,
 And sweet most bitter ; makes a mighty wind
 With wise words, strung in song or flung like fire
 In hearing of the million wrung with wrongs,
 Trample on error, grinding to the dust
 The lies that wrought oppression, till the time
 When truth shall triumph, and glad breezes float
 The banner of pure love and brotherhood

'Tween earth and heaven. Time, that will steal the stars
 From the fair firmament, and war with worlds,
 Whirling them through infinitude of space,
 Till they shall crumble piecemeal, and become
 The nothing that they were. Time, at whose touch
 Things fairest fade and fall into decay,
 Can never lessen love like mine which lies
 Hid in mine inmost being, forming part
 Of that which is for aye immutable,
 The secret soul, the incorruptible,
 Immortal as its Maker.

IANTHE.

Ah ! I knew

My mother must be wrong ! and had she lived
 To see you, Cuthbert, she would never say
 That men are ever false.

CUTHBERT.

Besides, I fear

All women are not true ; for I have known
 Many to break their plighted troth, and some
 Their marriage vows. I knew one once
 Who wrecked a noble life, and made a heart
 That used to be all love and gentleness,
 And reverence for women, harsh and cold,
 And loveless as her own.

IANTHE.

Alas ! your words

Have slain the truant wishes that I had
 To see the world which is called wonderful,
 The world of toil and pleasure. Dwelling here
 Amid the mountains, far from the vast crowds
 Which live and die in cities, I had thought
 Only of happiness ; and now I know
 So much of sin and sorrow lurking there
 Even among the good and beautiful,
 Dame Fortune's favourites, and the great, whom fame
 Flatters and fawns upon, why it were best,
 Methinks, that we should leave the poor mad world

To its own pleasures, and, contented here
 With one another, each a world to each,
 Live in a heaven of love and happiness,
 Unclouded and complete.

CUTHBERT.

The world to you

Is an unopened book, while I have learnt
 Whole chapters off by heart, and wearied of't
 As school-boys of hard tasks. At first, the words
 Were golden lettered, cunningly devised
 To ravish wanton eye and ear of youth—
 Pages of pleasant wording, perilous
 To every pure and noble sentiment
 That lurks in human breasts—luring to lap
 The eager earth-born senses lavishly
 In sensuous delights, and dalliance
 Of things unholy. Then there came a time
 When the bright burnished gold, that I had loved
 To linger on, grew dim with using, so
 Beneath the gilt (for after all I found
 It was but gilding) cruel maxims, harsh
 And world-wise, mocked at me, until heart-sick
 I closed the book, and turning with a laugh
 I left the world to wither !

IANTHE.

That is why

You sought these solitudes ?

CUTHBERT.

Yes, that is why,—

And here I rest contented.

IANTHE.

How the clouds,

The earth-born clouds, have shut us from God's stars !
 As sin shuts out from heaven.

CUTHBERT.

There is a storm

Swift gathering o'er our heads ! and even now
 I hear the heart-beats of the hungry sea
 Impatient for his prey. Let us go in !
 And you shall sing to me.

SCENE III.—*The mouth of a cavern in the Alps.—Time, Midnight.*

CUTHBERT and MAGICIAN.

MAGICIAN. Are you prepared, as I enjoined, with fasts,
And many vigils? Come you here to-night
With heart as fearless as the flashing foam
Which leaps my native mountains, and with mind
Bent to one high resolve? Give me your hand!—
It trembles not.

CUTHBERT. I am determined still
To test your powers unto their utmost verge.
And if in doing this or you, or I,
Or both, should pause upon a precepice
Which tempts us to perdition, we must stand
Or fall according to our strength: or else
If we should light upon a wealth of truth,
Which men have missed for lack of searching, then
The secret is your own, and you can keep
Or sell it as you list.—Here is the gold
I promised; and if you can bring again
The woman I have loved and injured, so
That I may feast mine eyes upon her face,
Then treble that vast sum your greedy hands
Clutch as if 'twere a passport to the realms
Within the pearly portaled Paradise,
Where God—

MAGICIAN. Hold! are you mad, to breathe that name
Here at the gates of hell? The very sound
Hath power to shake these mountains, which have mocked
At decades of decadence, to their depths;
And scare the haunting spirits, so that none
Can work them to their will.—Mortal! take care
To keep all sacred names, but chiefly that,
Close locked within your lips awhile; for here

One, Satan reigns supreme, and he will brook
No rivals in his realms.

CUTHBERT. Aye—it is well—
I will remember your wise words ; and now
Would learn the means and method you propose
For our procedure ?

Ay laugh!

You well may laugh to think there have been fools
Who sought to win the hard heart of the world,
And thought it worth the winning, and the woe
Which is fair Wisdom's first-born ; poured their wealth
Of minstrelsy (for such have ever striven
With song as their chief weapon) at her feet,
And fawned upon her heedlessly, nor marked
The mocking smile upon the dainty lips,
The curling coral lips, till she hath turned
And told them to their face that she is false.

CUTHBERT. Men's hearts are like poor sailors out at sea
 Upon a sinking raft, when ever wave
 Loosens another plank, until at last
 But one remains to which they madly cling
 For weary hours : then mightier than the rest
 Comes one bold billow and with cruel hand
 Snatches it from them, so they sink, or swim
 Till tardy succour come. And I have seen
 Some men outlive the wreck of every hope,
 And some who have endured to see their kin,
 Their nearest friends expire, and then have fall'n
 Beneath the last blow, when the best beloved
 Proved false or died. In this hard world more men,
 Ay ! and more women, die of broken hearts
 Than of aught else beside ; for gnawing grief
 Is death's most firm ally—it is his hand
 That snatches from our hearth the fairest flower
 Of the whole household, that will sometime slay
 The strongest and the bravest ; cautiously
 He twines about their hearts his cruel cords,
 Slowly but surely, till perforce they break.
 To me it is a mighty mystery,
 This misery which eats away men's lives.

MAGICIAN. The earth is heaped with mysteries, as heaven
 Is strewn with sun-lit stars, which in themselves
 Are mysteries. We are all mysteries,
 Shapen in mystery, our path through life
 A maze of mysteries, and then comes Death,
 The crowning mystery, and leads the way
 From darkness to the dawning. This same Death,
 Whom men call King of Terrors, and upbraid
 As the chief cause of pain, from whom they fly
 (Like timid deer, at sound of hunting horn)
 When but the echo of his following falls
 Upon the strained hearing—this same Death
 Is but a princely suitor come to claim
 His beautiful betrothed, his mortal bride ;

And when he, stooping, takes her in his arms,
 As tenderly as a young bridegroom may
 The maiden that was made his own at morn,
 And presses kisees on the quivering lips,
 She, swooning with such unsuspected bliss,
 Is passive born from this her maiden home
 To the rich palace of her matronhood,
 Where Peace and Plenty, purest handmaids wait,
 And Love is aye her lord.

CUTHBERT. Alas ! we know

That we are debtors all of us to Death,
 Debtors with nought to pay ; and this it is
 That makes the mightiest in his presence pale,
 Nor dare to look the foeman in the face
 Unflinchingly.

MAGICIAN. Foeman didst say ? nay—friend

The truest and the tenderest, if men
 Would grasp the proffered hand, the guiding hand
 Which leads to liberty with light of truth.
 Here, in these haunts where darkness holds a court
 Of shapeless shadows, here where breezes moan
 In fitful gusts of mournful melody
 The dirge of the departed, here at eve
 (It was in winter time—I mind me well
 That it was winter, for the air was chill,
 But chillier was the heart which scarcely beat
 In ever lessening pulses in my breast)
 Upon an eve, I say, a winter eve,
 When the whole land was lapped in luxury
 Of sunless silence, I shook hands with Death.
 Nay ! start not—'twas a shapely hand I held,
 A shapely hand that stealthy from my touch
 Stole slyly to the pulses of my heart
 And clutched with its cold fingers—nay, but these
 Are solemn, sacred secrets, while as yet
 You are a novice in our artifice ;

And the red blood hath fled your tell-tale cheeks,
 As stars will flee the burning chariot wheels
 Of Sol the crownéd conqueror ; or as sleep
 At touch of fair Aurora on the lids
 Wet with the joyful tears we shed in dreams
 Of other day delights, and loves long dead
 Yet unforgotten ; or as error flies
 The heralder of hurricanes of truth.
 Wilt have the gold again ? and leave the search
 For this poor maid, who as a meteor flashed
 When the fair firmament of life was black,
 And flaming for an instant passed for aye,
 Leaving a double darkness deep as death ?

CUTHBERT. The moon is making merry in her tent
 Of many folded cloudlets, while the Night
 Is nearing fast the verge whence looking down
 (As from some craggy height a mountain maid)
 Dizzy with terror she will fall, and dash
 Her starry crown to fragments. It is time
 These wonders were unfolded.—Lead the way !
 I am no craven-hearted churl who tells
 The glories of the wars, but brings no scars
 With truer tales as teachers. On, I say !
 And be it to hell's bounds I'll follow thee.

(*They enter the cavern, which is in total darkness.—The MAGICIAN guiding CUTHBERT with his voice.*)

MAGICIAN. Fearest thou ?
 The path is narrow, hollowed by a hand
 In the vast mountain's womb—a gaping grave
 For guilt and glory. Should you turn or stay
 A moment we are lost.

CUTHBERT. On ! on ! I come.

(*A pause.*)

MAGICIAN. No ray of light, save from the smouldering fires
 Which sleep within the mountain's heart, hath lit
 This blackness through the ages ; and no foot
 Of mortal man, before mine own, hath dared
 To venture through its depths. Keep a good heart,
 And follow closely.

(*Another pause.*)

CUTHBERT. Ah ! I hear strange sounds
 As of fast flying feet, and gasping groans
 As of some being in distress.

MAGICIAN. Ay, there are many millions in distress,
 Here and elsewhere.

CUTHBERT. How far wouldst have me come ?

MAGICIAN. Another moment and we reach the spot
 Where spirits may be summoned. So—your hand.
 This is a spacious hall, fashioned by Him
 Who framed the outer world, and lies beneath
 The summit of the mountain. Lean you there—
 Against that pillar—and your eyes shall see
 The form for which they hunger.

(*Incantation.*)

Spirit of this mortal's love !
 Whether couched in bliss above,
 Whether held in pangs below,
 Fed by fires, consuming slow,
 Or where'er thy presence be,
 In bondage or at liberty,
 By the Power that sanctions me,
 By the Lord who reigneth here,
 To my summoning appear !

(*A light appears at the further end of the hall, and growing gradually, discovers the spirit of Mabel standing in the further entrance.*)

CUTHBERT. It is my love ! my Mabel—I will go
And take her to these arms again !

MAGICIAN *holding him.*

Madman !

Beware.—A single step may plunge your soul
Black with its countless sins, impenitent,
Beyond the reach of penitence.—Yet speak !
The vision may perchance reply to thee.

CUTHBERT. Mabel ! my love—my lost love—is the sin,
My sin forgiven you ? or is your soul
Chained for its expiation ?—Shall *I* come
And share the sorrow, softened by the bliss,
The boundless bliss of meeting ? Is there aught
That I can suffer which shall earn release
From Powers which have the power to bring you here
At this man's bidding ?

MABEL.

Cuthbert—Ianthe.

CUTHBERT. Nay, Mabel !—by the happy hours we passed,
The brief bold hours of sunshine that is shed
But once upon life's pathway ; by the storms
Which swift succeeded, and the winter time
That I have lived since widowed of your love ;
By the great hope I have of holding you
One day within these arms, pain purified
From taint of sin and clinging sense of shame,
The burning sense that slew you ; by all this,
And these, and everything that earth or heaven
Holds as most sacred do I swear to thee
That I have never wavered from my love,
My first fond love, one instant. That I sinned
In lingering with Ianthe is most true,
Sinned against her not thee.—Had not her eyes
Been mirrors of thine own ; her face, her form,
Her features so like thine that nought but love
Could tell the difference ; had her flaxen hair
Been any shade of colour save the one

That I had praised untiringly ; her voice
 The very echo of the thrilling tones
 Which spoke my name e'en now, so like that oft
 I with closed eyes have listened till I thought
 It was *your* voice I listed ; had she been
 Less pure than you were e'er my passion made
 You as you now are—had not these things been
 I should not thus have lingered, thus have sinned,
 Nor thought upon Ianthe.—Mabel ! love !
 Smile on me once again, and when the morn
 Throws wide the Paradisal gates, and floods
 The world with showers of sunshine, I will go
 And, seeking her in her far mountain home,
 Will say farewell for ever.

Echo.
 For ever.

Say farewell

MABEL. Farewell—we yet shall meet—forgiven.

CUTHBERT. Going so soon ! with not a word of love ?
 Mabel you shall not leave me !—by the God—
 (Thunder.)

MAGICIAN. Stand back ! for she is gone—nor have I power
 To bid her stay.

CUTHBERT. Then will I follow her !
 Nay—at your peril hold me not, old man !
 I care not for your yawning pit of death !
 I care not for your hell and hosts of fiends !
 I care not for your thunder and your threats,
 Old liar, drunk with gold !—hands off, I say !
 For I will follow though high God himself
 Stand in the path to slay me !

(Thunder and flashes of fire—the mountain shakes.—CUTHBERT
 rushing forward, falls to the earth in a swoon.

SCENE IV.—*A Village Churchyard—Sunset—IANTHE kneeling by a Grave.*

(CHORISTERS *chanting in the Church.*)

Look from Thy glory
 Christ ! for Thy story
 Is winning its way to the heart of mankind—
 They who were spurning
 Thy pity, and turning
 Groped for lost light in the solitude, blind—
 They who were weeping,
 They who were sleeping,
 They who were seeking but failing to find—
 They who were sining,
 Unconsciously spinning
 The shroud to enfold them, their funeral pall—
 They who were clinging
 About Thee, and bringing
 The sorrows and sins which were wont to enthrall—
 They who in bearing
 Life's burden, despairing
 Rush to the river to welcome the wave—
 They who defiling
 Thy image, beguiling
 The innocent maid to her purity's grave—
 They who are living
 Thy life of forgiving,
 They who have found Thee a friend in their need—
 They who were bending
 To idols, and lending
 Their hearts to a homage of golden gained greed—
 They who were drinking
 Life's pleasures, and shrinking
 From Death the forerunner of glory to come—
 They with hope faded
 Fighting unaided,
 Struggling for truth in the solitude, dumb—

They with days numbered,
 Tottering cumbered
 With years and with yearnings for mercies now missed—
 They who beginning
 The world would be winning,
 They whom the fickle-lipped Fortune hath kissed—
 They, who heart broken
 With sorrow unspoken
 Bend like bruised reeds in the blasts of Thy wrath—
 They who were roaming
 Alone in the gloaming,
 Waiting the stars which fair Night might bring forth—
 They who were missing
 Their lost ones, and kissing
 The brow that was cold, and the lips that were still—
 They who were scorning
 Each terrible warning,
 Hirelings of Satan and working his will—
 They who were bitter,
 And thought it were fitter
 To die than to live with no God in the land—
 They who were fearful,
 They who were tearful,
 They who Thy pitiful voice could withstand—
 All would be turning
 To Thee, with a yearning
 To grasp in the darkness the strength of a hand.

IANTHE. Sweet Mother ! do you know that I am here
 Kneeling so near you on the grass-grown sod ?
 Will you not hear my whisper ? is your heart
 Closed as this grave is 'gainst compassion ? God !
 I would have given all I had save her
 Who was my all, my mother ! but is now
 A crowned immortal, or a thing of clay
 Which once had life and hath not. I have called
 Day after day, and still no answer comes—
 Unless the breeze which cools my fevered brow,

Unless the flowers which lift their heads and sigh,
 Unless the sun which hides his blushing face
 Behind the little church be answers. I have strewn
 Fresh flow'rets on her grave, and there they lie—
 Some withered, as she withered, in their bloom,
 And some still panting in a living death
 Such as I live and die not. Mother mine !
 Share you my sorrows ? know you that my Love
 Hath gone from me ? as Christ and heaven have gone
 From the lost spirits fallen by their sin
 From heavenly places ! gone from me unforgiven !
 For I was hard, and held forgiveness back,
 Calling him perjured ; scorning to receive
 His pity for my love, and passion-pain,
 His *love* another's. Will he come again,
 And hold me in his arms as in the days
 Which died when he departed ? Shall I lie
 In lingering caress of lavish love
 Which knows no stay nor slaking ? or will Death
 Open his arms and take me to *his* heart
 And kill me with hard kisses ? Pity me,
 Cold cruel Death, and spare me—I am young
 And have not wronged thee ! I am sad and tired,
 And fain would yield me prisoner to sleep,
 But fear that thou would'st come and snatch my breath,
 Foul ravisher of life and living love.
 Pity me Death ! and let me lie unharmed
 Among the flowers a little.

(She lies down with her head resting on the grave.)

How the dew
 Hath risen like soft memories around her bed,
 Her bed and mine ! We are so near,
 And God is nearer.—Mother dear good night—
 I am so weak and weary.

(Sleeps.)

(*An escort of Angels descend.*)

1ST ANGEL. Speak softly ! she must pass away in sleep,
And feel no pain. Then will we bear her soul
Through yonder gates to glory.

2ND ANGEL. She is fair !

3RD ANGEL. And shall be fairer.

4TH ANGEL. Innocence is shrined
In every lineament !

(*IANTHE moaning in her sleep.*)

Kind Death ! sweet Death !

Leave me a little longer.

5TH ANGEL. My poor child !
When she awakes immortal, she will know
And spring to meet her mother. Oh ! I've longed,
Even amid the bounteous bliss of heaven,
To pillow her fair head upon my breast
As when she was a child, and ran to me
With every childish sorrow.

6TH ANGEL. How her face
Pales in the starlight.—We will scatter snows
About her body from the heavens ; a shroud
Fit for such virgin purity.

7TH ANGEL. She sighs—
A deep drawn sigh of suffering—and her hands
Are pressed against her heart as if in pain.

5TH ANGEL. God ! command Death slay her quickly.

(*The Spirit of IANTHE rising from the prostrate body.*)

Mother !

1ST ANGEL. Let us away to God !

(*The Angels ascend bearing IANTHE in their midst.*)

SCENE V.—*A Library—The Table is strewn with manuscripts and writing materials.*

(CUTHBERT alone.)

DEAD!—and a double murder at my door—
 Great God! why was I made a cloud to curse
 The sunshine of two lives? I should have died
 In early youth, ere passion was my God,
 And snatched my soul and theirs, the sister souls
 Of chastity and truth—in those dead days
 When I was but a poet lad, o'erwhelmed
 Beneath grand thoughts of honour, and of love
 That should out-rival heaven in purity, and fed
 With hopes of fame, and the great aftermath
 The world should reap from wisdom taught in song.
 Or even had I fall'n when first I found
 The battle was against me—had I fled,
 A coward from the field, the scorn of foes,
 Rather than turn my hand against my friends
 Who looked to me for safety—had I sung
 And slept forgotten—had I stood a man,
 And flung the gauntlet in the world's false face,
 Defying to the death. What fools we are!
 What blind and trustful fools we are to drink
 The kiss of pleasure from the honeyed lips
 Of such a wanton! She with bold eyes, keen
 To stab our senses, and to steal our souls
 While that we lie half swooning in her arms,
 And desperate with delight rush on the wrath
 Of the Most High unheeding, till we stand,
 The sweet draught quaffed, aghast and shuddering
 At the fond folly—bartered, baffled, lost—
 The slaves of vilest sins.

(Approaches the Table.)

See! here they lie,
 The weapons which I thought would win the world,

And raise my name into the rank of kings,
 Uncrowned yet conquering, and ruling hearts
 The kingliest kingdoms—Here's a poem penned
 In my hot youth to set the world on fire,
 But the spark only caught my heart, and lo !
 It lay in ashes—here is one I wrote
 When love was lustrous, shining like a star
 In heaven of my hope ; some sonnets too
 To my sweet lady's eyes and pencilled brows—
 And here a lay I sung when in the wood
 I watched dead leaves fall through the shuddering air
 Which strove to hold them—there are verses wrung
 With weary labour from my o'erwrought brain,
 A task for critics slander—and a scene
 From an unfinished play, which might have been
 A fortune or a failure—What are these ?
 A score of songs all labelled, sung and sealed
 When, mad with grief, I thought to fling my soul
 Across the boarders to eternity ;
 And hymn of puny praise when I was plucked,
 Resisting my deliverer, from the brink
 Of yawning burning hell. There lies a book
 Which gained me golden guineas and was held
 A nine days' wonder, while a meed of praise,
 The richest guerdon to a poet's heart,
 Was measured out to me, until my wave,
 My little wave of song which I had thought
 Would raise the earth to heaven, breaking returned
 To its first source—And now I hold oncemore
 The song which was my solace when I woke
 And found my new-made bride (the wanton world)
 Had left me for another. Words like these
 Should count by pulses of the heart of him
 Who penned and lived them ; rhyme and rhythm cease
 In such mad misery to be his care,
 Yet without care they range them loyally,
 And heart cries forth to heart, as breakers roar
 To one another in a scourge of storms.

They are wild words perchance—I titled them
(An afterthought) for want of better term,

HERE AND HEREAFTER.

Shall we live again when this life is done ?
Shall we sometime wake from our last long sleep ?
Or will the waters of death, which won
Our clinging souls from their life hold, keep,
And bury their prey in the darkened deep ?

Great God ! we would stretch Thee our hands to hold,
But faltering, slip with the strength of sin :
The lustful loves, and the greed of gold,
The wayward world with its ceaseless din,
Crush back the yearnings which burn within.

We stand and gaze on the heaven of stars—
Hope steals to our side with a noiseless tread,
The gate of the past with her soft hand bars,
Then smiling points to the home o'erhead,
Till our sins are slain and our doubtings dead.

But the clouds are born and the stars are hid—
So we wake from our dream with a sob and a start,
And turn from the voices which pleading bid
Us still look up with a hopeful heart,
For the stars must shine when the shadows part !

Ah ! once I remember I said in my heart—
I spoke in my heart though my lips were dumb—
“ They shall speak my name in the world’s great mart ;
My fame shall sound ’bove the busy hum ;
They shall shout it still in the years to come.”

Ay ! yes, I remember—’twas summer time ;
And I smiled with the sense of a strength within,
As I set my thoughts to rhythm and rhyme
To stem the torrents of woe and sin,
As I rushed in the race with a heart to win.

Ay ! yes, I remember, when scarce a year
 Had waned and withered I sadly stood—
 Thought of the future and wished death near,
 Said, “ I will strive no more for the good,
 But live in the sin of a solitude.”

I thought to die, but my life is strong,
 And conscious throbs through my starting veins ;
 And I cannot die while the wealth of song
 That may ease some soul of its bitter pains
 Unsung in the depths of my heart remains.

Thou fair, false world ! in my eager youth
 I sought to win you, I wooed and sued ;
 You spoke me soft, and I thought that truth
 Must live in the heart of a form endued
 With beauty and grace in such plentitude.

Ah ! world, we hold you as lovers hold
 Their best beloved when some sorrow parts,
 We wrap our arms round you, world, and fold
 You close and closer to bleeding hearts.
 And taste the taint that your kiss imparts.

You are false, fair world, with your smiling face !
 A fair, false fiend, with no heart to lend
 To the passionate prayers of the human race,
 The millions who kneel at your shrine, and bend
 To your beauty's might till the years shall end.

You are false, fair world ! I would turn in scorn,
 And leave you and lose you, but ever again
 Turning to look on you, love, I mourn,
 And grief grows great with the parting pain,—
 I turn again and my scorn is slain.

God help me now ! shall I climb and climb
 The dizzy heights and my flag unfurl—
 The Poet's flag in a wintry clime—
 Only that Fate in his hate may hurl
 (Fate, the scorner of poets and rhyme)
 To deeper depths in my dark death-time ?

God help me now ! I have sung and striven
 To gain the goal—like an outcast star
 Which, for stain of sin in its heart, is driven
 Across the heavens with its woes afar,
 So have I sung while the sin stains mar.

I am weary and weak—and the tired days come,
 Droop, and die at my feet each night ;
 I said, “ I will struggle no more, but dumb
 Lay me down in the lap of delight,
 Since God is strong to uphold the right.”

Alas for the singer ! alas for his song !
 Men turn from his warnings, and mock at his woe—
 He who is spent in the war against wrong,
 He who no selfish contentment can know
 Is spurned as a stranger, and scorned as a foe.

And is there no hope in the coming of years ?
 No hope and no help for the toilers who sow,
 And water the seed which they scatter with tears ?
 Will sorrow be sealed with a bitterer woe
 When Death, the great Silencer, layeth them low ?

Nay—surely some time in the dawning of days,
 The flames that encircled their funeral pyre,
 The flames which were kindled by lingering lays,
 Will purge the whole world with a tempest of fire—
 So the satisfied singers shall grasp their desire.

Those words are fraught with faith and frenzy both,
 Faith for the future, but a gnawing fear
 Of that which now is—these which lie at hand,
 The letters looking up at me, dense dark
 On purest white, as antitypical
 Of my sin-sullied mind, crossed o'er with red
 Corrections for the press, as men with blood
 Atone for error—these are frenzied words
 Void of all faith, and were a later birth
 Of my wrought brain.

(*Reads.*)

Life—the rushing of waters
 That music make at our feet,
 Love—the sighs of Eve's daughters
 Which ever our world-walk greet.
 Oh life, and loving, and laughter !
 What matters the dread hereafter ?

For life is a good from the Gods,
 And love is the strength of the strong ;
 Till lips shall be silenced, and sods
 Shall stifle the sound of our song,
 The hours which such pleasures are bringing
 We'll measure with passionate singing.

The blood through our being swift hies
 As free as a flame of fierce fire ;
 Life lives in our hearts, and our eyes
 Are heavy with love and desire.
 Sure—the Gods would their glory be giving
 For one hour of such loving and living !

(*Enter LAWRENCE.*)

Ah, Cuthbert ! singing still ? I prophesied
 When you foreswore the muse seven years ago
 That you were poet to the core, and must
 Make melody while living, then would die

Like a swan singing, soaring with the strain
 You were word-weaving to the seraph land
 To lay as tribute at the feet of God.

CUTHBERT. Is it seven years since you and I clasped hands
 And parted?

LAWRANCE. Ay! seven years, my friend, no more.
 You were a mere lad then, for scarce a score
 Of summer suns had gladdened you, while I
 Was, as you know, two years your senior.
 You lived then in the luxury of love,
 Which was the reason that I left you, since
 It was my wish to see the world, as erst
 It was your own; but when I pressed the point,
 And asked if we, who had been friends so long,
 And fellow travellers, should start again
 Upon our journey, you swift silenced me
 With "Lawrance, go your way and see the world,
 And win it if you wish—my fate is fixed."

CUTHBERT. Do you remember her?

LAWRANCE. Her eyes would make
 A memory. I think I could describe
 The maiden as we came upon her first—
 Alone, unfriended; but that you must have
 The picture off by heart, with light and shade
 And the minutest detail, and would say,
 "She was more fair than this, or fairer far
 Than that description."—How the light leaped up
 Into your eyes when first you looked on her:
 And she, shy little maid, reading your soul
 With subtle instinct that a woman has,
 Drooped the long lashes o'er those twin blue heavens
 And, blushing, looked more beautiful—and how
 When we had left her till the morrow, you
 Wrapped silence round you as a cloak that keeps
 Our shiv'ring frame from wintry winds. I know

You slept not through the night, but turned and tossed
 Till dawning, framing her pure loveliness
 In verse of love's own making.—Is she dead
 That you are here alone? or have you found
 The saint unworthy of your worshipping?

CUTHBERT. Within a year after you left she died.

LAWRANCE. Poor child! Death is a tyrant to the weak,
 But shuns the strong who could the better face
 And grapple with the horror. So she died,
 And you are still chief mourner. Well, perchance
 It is a fairer fate than mine, and hers
 Who once was mine by name.

CUTHBERT.

Laura, you mean?

The little Laura whom you loved, and said
 Should be your wife—for whom you used to write
 Such long descriptions of the towns and folks
 We saw and visited—is she too dead?

LAWRANCE. Dead—nay, it is far worse than death when faith
 Is recompensed with falsehood. She hath fled—
 Fled with a man I entertained as friend,
 And trusted in all honour.—God, I scarce
 Can speak of it e'en now! And yet perchance
 I was too hard upon my wife, and left
 Her lonely though I loved her; showing none
 Of that soft sympathy and tenderness
 Which ever wins a woman—so she fled—
 I followed and accused them of their sin,
 Then left them to their folly. Would that fate
 Had fashioned me a lot less bitter! one
 That left me honour, at the least—honour
 Or love.

CUTHBERT. We are like men who lose their way
 At night in some strange country, yet press on
 With stumbling feet which lead they know not where,
 And hands stretched out to grasp they know not what,

Until the daylight dawn, when everything
 Seems changed, and they with shrinking shun
 Those paths that seemed most pleasant to their feet
 An hour before.—And we can scarcely guess
 What this life is till it has ebbed away
 For ever from us, and we view the past
 Standing within the circle of pure light,
 Which radiates from God Himself in heaven.
 Often there comes a crisis in our lives,
 When we, like travellers standing at cross roads,
 Survey with anxious eyes the varied paths
 That stretch before us : then at last we choose
 Nor know if it be wisely, which 'tis left
 The future to reveal.

LAWRANCE.

But when at length

We have so chosen—then 'twere vain to fight
 Against our fixed fate.

CUTHBERT.

Ay—there is oft

No turning back ; and our repentance comes
 Too late to aught avail.

LAWRANCE.

Cuthbert—I fear

That you have mourned into a misanthrope,
 And lost the fair and faultless faith which was
 Your dower in earlier days. And yet methinks
 If that your heart is still a spring of song,
 A well-spring of wild waters, and your lips
 The overflowing outlet—if your soul
 Is set to its own music, strange and sweet
 And subtle as the Orphean strains which shook
 And woke the world to wonder, yet so soft
 As to steal entrance to a flowret's ear
 And lingering lull to slumber—if the power
 Of weaving words remains you, then I know
 The noble in your nature triumphs still
 Over your meaner instincts—then the God
 That breathes through all our being will assert
 His purity and kinghood. For the rest—

The world is yet before you. Young and strong
 You still may gain the ear, and thence the heart
 Of the sweet syren.

CUTHBERT.

The fair world I know
 Is waiting to be wooed, but I alas !
 Have lost the wish to win her. Yet I would
 That she were lapped in dalliance of delights,
 And soothed with soft contentment—that the wrongs
 Which she hath wrought into our web of life
 Were of her God forgotten—that the light
 Of love and brotherhood were shed abroad
 In all her streets and temples, so that sin
 Should no more sully even saintly hearts
 Bowed low in lowly worshipping. I would
 That men were friends in deeds not words—
 That hearts were strengthened by a hope within,
 A glimpse of glimmering glory—that the good
 Were loved for its own goodness, and the ill
 Were shunned because it were so—then I would
 That women were as pure of heart and hope
 As century-tried Seraphim, that so
 Into the lives of lovers and of lords
 They might bring peace and purity, yet not
 By words so much as ministry of love
 And wisdom womanly—I would no war
 Of nations or of neighbours—and no eyes
 That look unkindly—and no lips on which
 A wrathful word would linger—and no hands
 That are not helping hands—and so no hearts
 That harbour sin or sorrow. Ah ! poor world,
 Could I but smooth a wrinkle from thy brow,
 Or ease thee of the burthen of thy pain,
 Then should my life be lighter, and my death
 The goal of glory.

LAWRANCE.

Well—I would not be
 A poet for the laurels and the light
 Of all the soaring singers !

CUTHBERT.

You are wrong—

I would not lose my poet-heart for aught
 The world can give or gain me. There is that
 In every singer's life which compensates
 For loss of the contentment which you boast,
 The sordid satisfaction that you feel
 In sight of others misery. Beside,
 If pain to us be keener, then by this
 Our pleasures are intensified, and bliss
 Is tenfold blessed. Poets' eyes, they say,
 See things in an exaggerated light.
 To them the trees and flowers are fairer far
 Than to another, and the rainbow's tints
 Seem brighter and more varied : the great sea
 Tells them its secrets ; and yon azure arch
 Which canopies the earth can scarce hide God
 And the high heaven of bliss. Music's sweet sounds
 Thrill swiftest to a poet's heart, and there
 Find a deep lodgement ; beauty in his eyes
 Is far more beautiful : love has its spring
 In his heart's core, and is imperishable
 And passionate : Time's ages are too short
 For his imagination, and he seeks
 To draw aside death's veil, and gaze within
 Eternity's dim regions : things which are
 To others vague, uncertain, and unreal,
 Stand out before him clearly ; shadows seem
 As substances to him ; while that which most
 Will call impossible, to him is sure.

LAWRANCE. There was a couplet that in dearer days
 Your lips were oft repeating—one you penned
 And framed a masterpiece in memory—
 'Twas this :—

Though the heart of the singer be wrapt in the night
 The songs that he sings may be rainbows of light.

Have you forgotten ? or are these
 Fair chaplets of pure songs your messengers
 To weary way-worn brothers ? See, I pluck

The flower that fadeth highest to my hand,
 And find—Ah me ! it is a lay of love.—
 Well—love is never old, though heads grow grey
 And hearts are seared by sorrows. Love is born
 In beauty every morning ; and at eve
 It dieth not with daylight, and delights
 That are the daylight's dowry.—Let us see
 If you who are a wanderer, and have dwelt
 In many cities, have heard newer news
 Of this sly trapster, Love.

(Reads.)

Love is like a river rushing,
 Pure and deep and swiftly strong—
 Or a fountain ever gushing
 Upward like a seraph's song.

Love is like a sunbeam, streaming
 Heaven and earth to re-unite—
 Love is like a strong light, gleaming
 In a wilderness of night.

Love is like soft music stealing,
 Strangely stealing to the soul—
 Love is like God's voice appealing
 In the threatening thunder's roll.

Love is like a fierce fire burning
 In a vessel tempest-tost—
 Love is like a Spirit yearning
 For the heaven which it hath lost.

Well—it is truth—but truth must win the world
 In its own might: like men who thread through crowds
 And bear down opposition with sheer strength.

CUTHBERT. Ay, yet our task is taught us—to uphold
 With all our prayers and powers the hands of Truth,
 Till that the cross-embazoned flag unfurl
 Its folded splendours on the hard-won heights,
 In sight of all the nations.

LAWRANCE. And when that
 Shall thus be compassed, then this earth will be

A wreck upon eternity.—Meanwhile
 The stars are fading in Night's coronet,
 And o'er the shoulders of the black-browed hills
 Aurora peeps, and flushes as a girl
 With arms about her lover's neck, and eyes
 That droop with loaded loving.—Let us stand
 Within the vine-clad portico, and watch
 The dawning of the day-king.

SCENE VI.—*The Sea Shore—A ship in the distance, from which rockets are fired at intervals.—Time: Midnight—A storm raging—Cuthbert and group of Fishermen.*

CUTHBERT. Is there not one with hope of heaven so sure,
 And love of life so little, to make trial
 Of strength with these wild waters ? Is there one
 With heart which melts to pity at the pain
 And peril of our brethren perishing
 For lack of succour—lapped into the jaws
 Of this mad roaring monster ? By the power
 That “ rideth on the storm, and makes the winds
 His chariot wheels,” I will essay alone !

1ST FISHERMAN. It were mere madness, and could only mean
 One life the less.

2ND FISHERMAN. Were there a hope—a chance
 Of our returning safely there were none
 More ready than myself.

3RD FISHERMAN. I have a wife
 And children who would miss me.

4TH FISHERMAN. Ay—and I.

CUTHBERT. Then you do right refusing. I have none
 To miss or mourn me—and no lily hand,
 No tender wifely hand would trembling twine
 A garland to my memory, and no lisping voice
 Of little child would stab its mother's breast
 By asking my home-coming.—I am one
 Love-hungry and all lonely—set apart
 By mine own folly and free force of fate
 A mark for scorn and sorrow. Storm on storm

Scathes yet may not destroy me ; “ day and night
His hand is heavy on me.” I have dared
 The dangers of your mountains—fearless stood
 Upon yon shadowy peaks where none of *you*
 Would shuddering dare to stand, and laughed to think
 I was so near perdition. I have sailed
 In frailer barks than these, with winds which waged
 A war as fierce and pitiless.—Nay more,
 I have faced fiends, and in their hellish haunts
 Dared Death’s destructions with a weakened hold
 On heaven and all things good, and tightening grasp
 Of everlasting horror.

Did I hear

A woman’s whisper ?—“ Young,” didst say “ and fair ?”—
 Ay friends ! as years go I am young—and fair
 Of face and form, moulded and fashioned so
 To show my Maker’s image—yet withal
 Most foul of heart and conscience—foul and fair—
 A “ whited sepulchre”—a blemished pearl—
 A goodly mansion ruined, undermined
 Of smouldering fires, which feeding on the frame
 Will fling the massive structure suddenly
 To doom irreparable.

5TH FISHERMAN.

He is mad—

Let him not go.

CUTHBERT.

Mad am I friend ?

Then be a wise man warned, and shun all sin
 As scorching from the fiend-fires.—Cling to Christ
 With firm resolve of faith, and give no heed
 To luring luxuries which lie as baits
 In manhood’s path to trap him. Live that so
 The last sigh be a sigh for bliss to come
 And not for dead delusions. As for me—
 I have most vilely sinned, and do repent
 Soul-sackclothed, contrite—See ! these hands bedewed
 With woman’s blood I consecrate to save
 The perishing unhelped—these fleet feet,
 Which were so swift for evil, now are turned

Expectant God-ward—while the strong man's voice,
Which spake such honeyed love words for the work
Of ruin it accomplished, now I lift
In warning to my fellows.

List!—the winds

Have lulled awhile—pausing upon their path
To mutter modes of vengeance, presage dire
Of doom which is to follow. Launch the boat!—
So Winds behold your prey—Come—hedge me round
With all your hellish horrors—heap the waves
In whelming waters high above my head,
And hollow out my graveyard—hiss and seethe
And press about your victim—crash and crush
And chill the blood which bounds within his veins,
And tear the life-breath from him—yet ye Powers
Which serve the Prince of Darkness learn ye this—
When all your strength is spended ye but cast
One soul the more from this strand to the next,
God's strand for shipwrecked life—eternity—
One soul from self all sinful to the arms
Of Him, though sinned against, forgiving all
Through Christ the sacrifice for sins as sand
Innumerable and infinite.

SCENE VII.—*A secluded Bay—Sunrise—Group of fisher-girls surrounding the body of Cuthbert.*

1ST GIRL. He is asleep—Death never looked so fair—
I do remember when my father died
He looked not so; but with a face grown hard
With fear and agony and unbelief
He died blaspheming.

2ND GIRL. How the sea
Clings to his yellow curls! I will kneel down
And kiss the parted lips—the perfect lips
Which seem to smile upon me—so he wake
Thinking *she* kisses him—his best beloved.

3RD GIRL. Nay—let him be—for Death hath claimed his own
And will not yield him to thee, but e'en now
Feeds on the prostrate form. Yet ye do well
To call him beautiful—though I have clasped

The hands of Death too often not to know
 And recognise his presence. See !—I press
 My hand upon his heart and feel no pulse,
 No fluttering motion that might bid us hope
 Life were not gone far from him.—He is dead.—
 This mouth you praise shall never drink again
 The perfumed breath of bride or of betrothed—
 These deep blue eyes (for I have watched the youth
 Peril our mountain passes, and have marked
 The tender woman-eyes), these deep blue eyes
 Will turn no more to sunny skies in search
 Of God and glory, or of visioned flights
 Of ministering messengers to man,
 Nor down to summer seas to scan the depths
 Of darkness denized—these stalwart arms
 Will stretch no further succour.—He is dead—
 And we but left to mourn.

(Sailors approaching.)

1ST SAILOR.

What have we here ?

The body of our saviour ?

2ND SAILOR.

It is he,—

I know the features well—for when last eve
 We took his boat and left the sinking ship
 At this young stranger's bidding, looking back
 I saw the lurid lightning light his face
 A moment with strange glory—when I turned
 To look again the ship was gone, and he,
 With all our comrades, was o'erwhelmed beneath
 The wilderness of waters.

3RD SAILOR.

He was brave !

2ND SAILOR. Most brave and stout of heart.—I heard his voice
 Shout as we left for shore—“push off, my lads !
 Push off—and fear not !”—to the others “we
 Can die as men who hope for heaven through Christ !”

3RD SAILOR. There is no doubt but he hath found the heaven
 For which he hungered.—May God grant that so
 When *our* time come we have firm faith as he,
 And die God-comforted !

1ST GIRL. Then it is true—too true—and he is *dead*.